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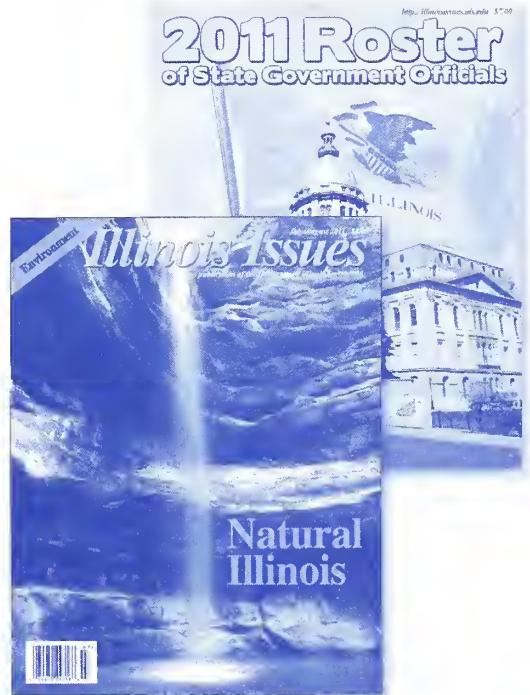
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State gets a red 'F' for ending writing tests



Dana Heupel

When Bob Knight was coaching basketball at my Hoosier alma mater, he once belittled sports journalists by saying: "All of us learn to write in the second grade. Most of us go on to greater things."

I remember thinking at the time: "Well, Coach, you literary lion, by second grade, I had learned the rules of basketball, but I doubt you'd find my skills good enough to play for you. And my guess is that you couldn't meet my writing standards, either."

I revisit it now because it seems that our governor and state education officials agree with Knight. Over the past two years, they have eliminated all standardized tests for writing — last year for grades three, five, six and eight to save \$3.5 million; this year the only remaining exam, for 11th-graders, to save \$2.4 million. Since writing tests no longer will begin in third grade and occur at regular intervals as students progress through K-12, Gov. Pat Quinn and the State Board of Education appear to concur with Knight that a second-grade proficiency is indeed sufficient.

The state budget cuts don't forbid schools from teaching writing. But teachers' and schools' performance is now measured by how well students do on standardized tests — and that focus is reinforced by financial incentives. It's only natural that they will spend classroom time and energy on the subjects that will be tested and neglect those areas that won't (see page 25).

Amazingly, this new policy comes in an era when students are writing more than they have in recent memory, through text messages and Facebook posts and 140-character "tweets." Writing instruction might even be more valuable to them than it was in the past.

I do understand that identifying topic sentences and ensuring that subjects and verbs agree can be boring and of questionable worth. But showing students what constitutes good writing — and what does not — reaps benefits that extend way beyond diagramming sentences.

It's important for students to learn how a skilled writer leads readers effortlessly down a path to be explored, using precise words as a compass. That the route taken is direct, not confusing or cluttered or obscured by flowery thickets. That it is concise, a guideline that serves well when texting or posting online.

Writing can also be a form of creative expression, perhaps the only outlet for those who can't play a musical instrument or draw a straight line. Even those who do possess other creative talents can benefit: Writing can often convey an idea that is impossible to express visually or aurally.

A recent example that rose up and confronted me was enfolded in an essay about Cesar Chavez in the July-August issue of *The Atlantic* magazine. Here is what Caitlin Flanagan wrote about the United Farm Workers organizer:

"For a hundred reasons — some cynical, some not — he and Robert Kennedy were drawn to each other. The Kennedy name had great appeal to the workers Chavez was trying to cultivate; countless Mexican households displayed photographs of JFK, whose assassination they understood as a Catholic martyrdom rather than an act of political gun violence."

Perhaps my interest was heightened by the fact that I lived for a while in the irrigated desert of central California where Chavez was based and where it was common to see Hispanic laborers in the fields in the early mornings picking vegetables or grapes or other fruit before the cruel afternoon heat made their work too dangerous. At any rate, Flanagan's two sentences struck me as so well-constructed and gracefully expressed that I sought out my wife to read them aloud. That kind of occurrence happens occasionally but not nearly often enough.

Finally, clear writing exhibits clear thinking. For me, at least, the act of writing helps me mold an abstraction into a concrete expression, solidifying

Editor's Note continued

my own thoughts about an issue while I advance an argument. Perhaps that process is best expressed in a quote by the late *New York Times* reporter and columnist James Reston that hangs on my office wall: "How can I know what I think until I read what I write?"

We've all puzzled over the intent of a poorly written email that shows up in our inbox. Is it a joke? Is it a criticism? How do I respond? There's no doubt that some communication can be achieved through "LOL" and "OMG." But the transaction of ideas can be so much richer and to the point when the communicators have all the tools within their reach.

Quinn, whose rambling speeches are legendary, and the State Board of Education don't seem to realize that. Or they just don't care.

• • •

This month, we unveil our redesign for *Illinois Issues*. Patty Sullivan, our talented graphic designer from Campus Services at the University of Illinois Springfield, created our new look.

To best display her new design elements, we are also now using full color throughout the magazine,

instead of just on the cover and selected sections.

"I am excited about the move to a full-color format," Sullivan says. "I chose the new accent color because to me, it is vibrant and energetic. For the layout, I wanted to freshen up the look of the magazine with more white space where possible, but not to radically alter the publication's character."

She has been designing *Illinois Issues* and maintaining the magazine's website since April 2008. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and joined the Campus Services department at UIS (then Sangamon State) in 1990. She also is involved in designing many other elements of the university, from business cards to large murals.

We expect that our magazine's design will continue to evolve, and we are interested in hearing ideas or suggestions from our readers. Please let us know what you think. ☐



Patty Sullivan

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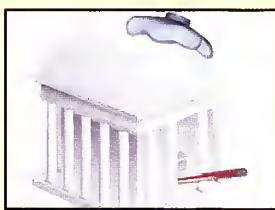
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Sex offender legislation is often more about politics than justice

Jamey Dunn

Unless you spend time in the state Capitol, you would likely never imagine that lawmakers spend a good portion of their time debating a single issue: sex offenders.

A cursory search of the General Assembly's website shows two dozen bills that deal with sex offenders were introduced since the current legislative session began in January. They include bills requiring sex offenders to register with a university if they are students or workers there, and legislation that pushes the areas where they are allowed to live farther and farther away from places such as schools and parks.

There is a collective groan and eye roll from many Statehouse observers when some of these bills come up for floor debate, not because they think Illinois should take it easy on sex offenders — it would be a difficult task to find anyone who feels that way. It is because the passage of these bills is so politically charged that lawmakers fear voting against them — even bills that are nearly impossible to implement — because they do not want to get labeled as soft on crime by a political opponent during a campaign.

"Illinois for a long time has every new set of legislators come in, and they pass bills on crime because it looks good when you go back home and you say, 'I'm tough on crime.' So what happens is, we're now layered with bill after bill after bill," Rep. Rosemary Mulligan, a Park Ridge Republican, said in the last days of the spring legislative session while debating a bill that pertained to sex offenders.

"Most of us will vote for it because it looks bad if you don't, which is a mistake that happens when we continue to pass these kinds of laws." Mulligan and 90 of her House colleagues voted in favor of the bill.

When I started out at *Illinois Issues* as an intern, one of my wry classmates observed that sex offenders were the only group with so much legislation concerning them that did not have a lobbyist. Apparently the idea was not a new one. *Illinois Issues* reported in June 2005 that future Senate President John Cullerton remarked after several such bills came up in a committee hearing: "It seems like every other bill deals with sex

offenders. If they had any money, they should hire a lobbyist." Since then, at least one registered pedophile has come to Springfield to testify in committee about a piece of legislation that would affect sex offenders. And juvenile justice reform organizations lobby lawmakers if they think proposed penalties for minors are too punitive.

However, because the issue is such a political hot potato, little public debate takes place over which ideas are workable and what penalties might hurt those who do not easily fit the description of a pedophile.

"The big thing is, nobody wants to be seen as being soft on sexual perversion," says Rep. Jim Sacia, a Republican from Pecatonica. A former special investigator with the FBI, Sacia sponsored a bill that would give judges discretion when sentencing offenders in so-called Romeo and Juliet cases. Such cases involve young people who had consenting sexual contact — often within the context of a relationship — but one of the two is under the legal age. People in these cases have been labeled as sex offenders, sometimes for a decade or more, for something they did when they were young that was not a predatory act. "The registry is such a joke, in my opinion anyway, because we continue to treat Romeo and Juliet crimes the same way we do a sexual deviant," Sacia says. "I literally have five couples that I know of in my district that the man is married to the woman now." Sen. William Haine, an Alton Democrat, sponsored similar legislation in the Senate, and like Sacia's bill, it also could not get the necessary support to pass. Haine, a former state's attorney, says such offenders should not escape punishment but should not have to register. "Those cases should be prosecuted, and people should be deterred."

Both lawmakers say they will continue to push legislation to change the registry policies. "We've had attempts in the past to change this, and they've come to naught because of the political fear of voting on anything," Haine says. It is an indicator of the climate surrounding the issue that two legislators with law enforcement backgrounds and

“The registry is such a joke, in my opinion anyway, because we continue to treat Romeo and Juliet crimes the same way we do a sexual deviant.”

Rep. Jim Sacia

tough-on-crime records — both spoke passionately against the repeal of the death penalty during floor debate — cannot rally support behind such a measure.

One legislator points to a recent audit as an indicator that lawmakers must start thinking about how the bills they pass will be implemented in the future. “I’m as tough as anybody on these offenders, but we need to make sure what we are doing actually does something,” says Rep. Jack Franks, a Marengo Democrat. He says an audit of the Sex Offender Management Board (SOMB) is a prime example of good intentions that go nowhere in practice.

Auditor General Bill Holland found that the board, whose responsibilities went into effect in 2004, was far from fulfilling its primary goals of tracking sex offenders after they are released from prison. The board has not created a tracking system and does not have a solid plan or timeline to do so. According to the audit, 10,039 sex offenders in Illinois are currently eligible for board monitoring. The audit found that the board was impeded by a lack of staff and funding and by a lack of any laws supporting its efforts.

“Current Illinois law makes it extremely difficult for the SOMB to develop a system to follow the progress of offenders who have completed their sentence,” the audit states. “Under current Illinois law, registration as a sex offender does not require either supervision or monitoring. Approximately two-thirds of registered Illinois sex offenders are not under any form of supervision. Thus, the law does not require that the vast majority of convicted sex offenders who have served their sentence be subject to any mandated supervision or monitoring. As a result, the SOMB faces significant challenges in devising a program to evaluate the treatment progress of sex offenders who are under no legal requirement to report this progress or even cooperate in a minimal way with the SOMB.”

Franks says, “Sometimes the left hand doesn’t know what the right hand is doing.”

He suggests that lawmakers create a commission to look at sex offender laws with a critical eye and make suggestions for clearing out redundancies and concepts that are not being used in practice.

Some lawmakers say a bill to bring Illinois in line with federal legislation would be one way to make the system more coherent, but even Haine, a sponsor of such legislation, warns that such a change should be done with deliberative care.

The federal government is pushing states to pass their own versions of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, also known as the Adam Walsh Act, which would create national

requirements for how states deal with pedophiles. If states sign on, it would allow for the sharing of registry information on a national scale.

But the plan has run into controversy. Ohio, the first state to comply, saw thousands of legal challenges from offenders who were ordered to spend more time on the registry than they were originally told. Some of them had already completed their required time and were told they had to start registering again because their crimes had been reclassified. In the end, the state’s supreme court threw out provisions of the bill.

Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, South Carolina, South Dakota and Wyoming have all signed on to the federal standard. CNN reported that the number of offenders on Wyoming’s registry increased from 125 to 1,450 after the state moved to federal registration guidelines. Activists for juvenile justice reform and civil rights across the nation have voiced opposition, saying the plan paints with too broad of a brush and does not allow law enforcement officials to focus limited resources on those most likely to reoffend.

Those are some of the reasons that Haine says he put the brakes on his Illinois legislation. “I held the bill until October ... so we can have people come in and offer their views before we take this leap.”

States were required to comply by the end of July or lose some federal funding in 2012. However, the Illinois State Police submitted the state’s compliance paperwork by the deadline. The feds say it will take about three months to sift through the entries and find out which states made the cut. Haine and a spokeswoman for the state police both say they are not concerned that the state will lose funds. “The federal government’s going to have to wait until we pass it,” Haine says. State lawmakers should be reluctant to take such sweeping changes handed down from the federal government, he says, without first seriously reviewing them. “In some instances, Congress adds things that some congressman dreams up from who knows where, and it may or it may not be a good idea.”

Haine says that when Illinois originated its sex offender registry, lawmakers did not consider some of the potential outcomes, such as the Romeo and Juliet cases. “This wasn’t well thought out a number of years ago when we started down this registration path. ... It was a good thing to do, but it wasn’t done with critical thought.”

Sacia agrees: “The devil’s in the details. ... We keep striving for perfection ... but how many times do we create unintended consequences?”

Haine warns that the politics makes a future rollback next to impossible. “Once we pass these things, and they are signed into law, it is very difficult to go back into the law.”

Haine says when sentencing is the topic of legislative debate, he likes to dust off a quote from former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. “He said, ‘The hallmark of the law is reasonableness.’ ... And that’s what we’re trying to do here. It shouldn’t be based on an unthinking emotional reaction or a harsh vindictiveness. It should be reasonable.”

Noteworthy

Photographs courtesy of Marlon Chaney



Nancy Ryherd and Linda Schroeder wanted to make history. So the Decatur couple turned out at the Macon County Clerk's Office, hoping to be the first pair in line when clerk Stephen Bean opened his office's door at midnight June 1. It turned out that they were the first couple in Illinois to receive a civil union license. The two were united in a June 5 ceremony.

More than 1,600 couples in June sought licenses to be united in civil union ceremonies, according to the advocacy group Equality Illinois, which surveyed representatives from county clerks' offices in all 102 of the state's counties and confirmed that Bean's office was the only one to open at midnight.

"We were very encouraged that so many people came out to obtain a civil license in the first days and in the first month because it just shows how important it is to families across the state," says Randy Hannig, director of public policy for Equality Illinois.



Photograph courtesy of Gov. Pat Quinn's office



Dozens of couples were legally united on June 2 — the first day for civil union ceremonies under the new law — at Millennium Park in Chicago.



Then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich meets with reporters.

CONVICTED GOVERNOR Blagojevich awaits sentencing

Former Gov. Rod Blagojevich has requested a new trial but faces sentencing for his corruption convictions next month.

A jury convicted Blagojevich on 17 of 20 counts in June. Jurors found him not guilty on one count connected to an alleged plot to squeeze campaign money from road construction firms before he would sign a tollway plan that would benefit some builders. The jury did not reach a verdict on another charge related to that scheme and one tied to an alleged attempt to strong-arm U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel, now mayor of Chicago, into arranging a Blagojevich fundraiser before the governor would release a grant to the Chicago Academy. The defense called Emanuel to testify in the former governor's retrial. Prosecutors reportedly do not plan to retry Blagojevich on the two charges that the jury could not agree on.

The jury found Blagojevich guilty on charges related to his best-known scheme, attempting to sell

Barack Obama's former Senate seat for personal or political gain. He was also convicted on charges relating to his trying to get representatives of the horse racing industry to trade campaign contributions for his signature on a bill that would benefit it, as well as holding up legislation related to funding in an attempt to extort campaign contributions from the chief operating officer of Children's Memorial Hospital.

In his first criminal trial, Blagojevich was convicted of one charge of lying to federal officers. That jury could not reach an agreement on 23 other counts. A sentencing hearing is scheduled for October 6. Blagojevich is not allowed to travel out of the federal Northern District of Illinois without permission from Judge James Zagel, who presided over both of Blagojevich's trials.

Blagojevich's lawyers have requested a new trial. Their motion reiterated many of the complaints the defense voiced during both of the former governor's

Governor issues vetoes to rewrite budget

Gov. Pat Quinn used his veto pen to make parts of the state budget sent to him by lawmakers more closely resemble the budget proposal he made to the legislature in February.

Quinn proposes cutting transportation funding back to Fiscal Year 2011 levels, which would mean an \$89 million reduction. Transportation funding was cut drastically in FY 2011, and Quinn proposed another big cut for FY 2012, but the legislature did not go along.

Quinn also calls for eliminating the funding for salaries of regional superintendents. He proposed eliminating regional offices of education in his original budget plan but met objections from school districts and legislators.

David Vaught, director of Quinn's Office of Management and Budget, says the governor would prefer that money formerly spent on transportation and regional administration be used to increase general state aid to schools. He says because general aid can be spent on anything, it would allow schools to use money at their own discretion. He calls it "the best, fairest way to distribute state aid for schools." Since Quinn cannot restore any funding to the legislature's budget, Vaught says the administration will lobby lawmakers to put money back into general state aid for schools, among other areas of spending.

The largest reduction Quinn proposed is a \$276 million cut to Medicaid funding for hospitals. The legislature approved about \$2.3 billion in such funding. Vaught says the reduction is meant to bring hospitals to the table to negotiate cutting their Medicaid rates. In his original proposal, Quinn called for cuts to Medicaid rates that he says would save the state an estimated \$550 million in the first fiscal year. "We hope that it helps convince the interested parties on this, which would be hospitals, to come to the table," Vaught says. "We have a rate system in Illinois that's been in effect for many years. It's not been changed for many

years. ... We're dealing with a very fast-growing industry that is growing more quickly than we can afford." He acknowledged that some nursing homes and hospitals felt they got the short end of the stick in recently approved nursing home legislation and a workers' compensation reform package, and that may complicate negotiations.

"We are going to urge the legislature to override the reduction in the veto session," says Danny Chun, spokesperson for the Illinois Hospital Association. He says the hospital community has already made strides to bring down costs to the state, and representatives are currently "at the table" for talks about "rate reform." But he says reductions must be more nuanced than Quinn's veto, which would mean an across-the-board rate cut. "This is serious stuff. This is not something that you do willy-nilly overnight in the spur of the moment."

Lawmakers would have to approve all of Quinn's cuts — many of which resemble pieces of his budget plan that gained little support during the spring legislative session. "In spite of the fact that he's going to be governor for four years — that he was elected — he certainly has not been able to assert the power within the office and his role in the process," says Kent Redfield, an emeritus political science professor at the University of Illinois Springfield.

Overall, Quinn proposes to reduce the general revenue budget approved by the legislature by \$376 million. After Quinn released his changes to the budget, Vaught said Quinn's reduction and line item vetoes are just part of the governor's long-term vision for the state budget, which would presumably include lobbying lawmakers to shift any trimmed funds to other areas of state spending. "Today is the reduction part," Vaught said.

Jamey Dunn

earlier trials. The lawyers argue that Zagel limited what topics they could bring up in court. They say they should have been able to play more of the secretly recorded tapes of Blagojevich's phone conversations and that he should have been allowed a chance to explain his statements. They complain that a news conference held on the day of Blagojevich's arrest — where U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald said the former governor's behavior "would make Lincoln roll over in his grave" — tainted the jury pool. The defense also claims that Zagel unfairly ruled in favor of the prosecution when objections were made during the trial.

Sam Adam Jr., who represented Blagojevich in his first trial, said he thinks there are grounds for an appeal based on the court's refusal to allow the defense to present some of the recorded phone conversations. He added that Blagojevich was unable to corroborate his testimony with this barred

evidence. "I think he'll end up vindicated," Adam told WLS-TV Chicago. He said he would work on an appeal if tapped to do so.

If the appeal is not successful, Adam predicted Blagojevich could be sentenced to five to nine years in prison for his convictions. "He's looking at some serious time here." He added that if Zagel determines Blagojevich lied during his testimony, the sentence could be longer.

After the verdict, Gov. Pat Quinn said it is regrettable that two of his predecessors, Blagojevich and former Gov. George Ryan, may soon be behind bars. Ryan is serving a six-and-a-half-year sentence in a federal prison at Terre Haute, Ind., for his conviction on corruption charges. "I'm very sorry that happened to [the Blagojevich] family, but you have to be accountable for your deeds," Quinn said.

Jamey Dunn

Gov. Pat Quinn was busy signing bills as the deadlines closed in for action on legislation passed in the final days of the spring session. The governor approved measures that will add some synthetic drugs to the list of controlled substances, bar the information of FOID card holders from public release and attempt to make sports safer for athletes in the state.

Murderer registry

HB 263, PA 97-1054 "Andrea's Law" requires first-degree murderers to register with the state for 10 years upon release from prison. The state will create an online database of registered offenders' information much like the current sex offender registry. The law is named after Andrea Will, a Batavia women murdered in 1998. Will's killer was released after serving 12 years in prison, half of his sentence. The law, sponsored by Elmhurst Republican Rep. Dennis Reboletti and Carol Stream Republican Sen. John Milner, goes into effect in January.

Free museum day

SB 1670, PA 97-0187 Cities and park districts can opt to make out-of-state visitors pay admission to museums on so-called free days. Previously, free admission days were for all attendees. The measure was sponsored by Chicago Democratic Sen. Kwame Raoul and Rockford Republican Rep. Joe Sosnowski.

Chemotherapy

HB 1825, PA 97-0198 Insurers who offer oral chemotherapy must give it to patients at the same cost as intravenous treatments. Chicago Democratic Sen. Heather Steans and Chicago Democratic Rep. Anne Williams sponsored the bill.

FOID cards

HB 3500, PA 97-0080 The information from anyone who applies for a Firearm Owner's Identification Card (FOID) is not available for public release under a Freedom of Information Act request. However, the information can be released for a criminal investigation. Lawmakers pushed the exemption after Attorney General Lisa Madigan ruled that the Illinois State Police must comply with a request for FOID records from the Associated Press. Hinsdale Republican Sen. Kirk Dillard and Cordova Republican Rep. Richard Morthland sponsored the legislation.

Safety belts

HB 219, PA 97-0016 Backseat passengers will be required to wear seatbelts, under a new law sponsored by Senate President John Cullerton from Chicago and the late Rep. Mark Beaubien, a Barrington Hills Republican. Passengers in taxis and emergency vehicles will be exempt from the measure, which goes into effect in January.

Synthetic drugs

HB 3042, PA 97-0194; HB 2089; PA 97-0192 The legislation adds chemicals, including methylene-dioxypyrovalerone (MDVP), to the controlled substances list. These chemical stimulants have been marketed for sale as "bath salts" and have made national news after a string of violent outbursts from users. Hinckley Republican Rep. Robert Pritchard and Chicago Democratic Sen. Jacqueline Collins sponsored **HB 3042**. Sen. Sam. McCann, a Carlinville Republican, and Rep. Wayne Rosenthal, a Morrisonville Republican, sponsored **HB 2089**.

HB 2595 Chemical components of synthetic cannabis, known as "spice" or "K2," will be added to the controlled substances list when this law goes into effect on January 1. Elmhurst Republican Rep. Dennis Reboletti and Chicago Democratic Sen. Jacqueline Collins sponsored the bill.

Sports safety

House Bill 200, PA 97-0204 Student athletes who sustain head injuries will need clearance from a doctor to return to play. The law also requires schools to provide parents, players and coaches educational materials about the dangers of concussions. House Minority Leader Tom Cross, a Republican from Oswego, and Chicago Democratic Sen. Kwame Raoul sponsored the bill.

HB 1130, PA 97-0234 "Zach's Law" requires any organization using a movable soccer goal to anchor it and properly secure it against tipping over. The law — named after Zach Tran, a 6-year-old boy from Vernon Hills who died after a soccer goal fell on him in 2003 — also bans the future production and sale of movable goals that are not tip-resistant. The bill was sponsored by Waukegan Democratic Sen. Terry Link and Vernon Hills Democratic Rep. Carol Sente.

Illinois DREAM Act

SB 2185, PA 97-0233 Students who came to this country illegally as children will now have more options for financial assistance to attend college. The Illinois DREAM Act will allow undocumented students to invest money into the state's prepaid tuition program. It also calls for the creation of a privately supported tuition fund, called the DREAM fund, administered by a board of volunteers. Senate President John Cullerton, a Democrat from Chicago, and Chicago Democratic Rep. Edward Acevedo sponsored the legislation. They have stressed that the program will not cost taxpayers.

Jamey Dunn

Redistricting challenged

Both Illinois' congressional map and the new state legislative district map face challenges in federal court.

A lawsuit filed by Republicans and a Republican-backed organization alleges that the congressional map dilutes the voting rights of the state's growing Hispanic population. The complaint, which names 11 current Republican Illinois House members as plaintiffs, says the map "blatantly discriminates against Republican and Latino voters." It says the new map effectively reverses the results of the 2010 congressional election, which gave Republicans control of the state's congressional delegation.

Those opposed to the map say Democrats are seeking to achieve such political goals at the expense of Latino voters. "Despite explosive growth in the state's Hispanic population, the Democrats' map intentionally discriminates against Hispanic voters by providing for only one Hispanic-majority congressional district — the same number the state of Illinois has had since the 1992 election cycle — and further weakens their voting strength by apportioning the rest of the community's population among a number of other districts drawn to specifically protect non-Hispanic white Democratic incumbents," said a prepared statement from the Committee for a Fair and Balanced Map, which includes Dennis Hastert, former Republican speaker of the U.S. House.

"We've listened to advocacy groups from various Latino communities," Chicago Democratic state Sen. Kwame Raoul, sponsor of the map, said as it was debated earlier this year in the Illinois Senate. He said no group called for two Latino congressional districts. "We have followed traditional redistricting principles in coming up with this map."

State Republican leaders filed a separate suit on similar grounds against the state legislative map. They claim the map violates the rights of minority voters, who they say would not be allowed fair opportunity to participate in the political process under the map. "The Democrats passed a map this session that we believe is in direct violation of the Federal Voting Rights Act and some of our most basic rights under the Constitution," House Minority Leader Tom Cross, said in a prepared statement. "They should be ashamed of themselves. We are optimistic that the court will agree with us and will help give our residents a fair map that accurately reflects our population, especially our growing Latino population."

While both lawsuits include individual Latino residents, no Latino advocacy group — many of which were vocal during the remap process — has yet signed on to either complaint.

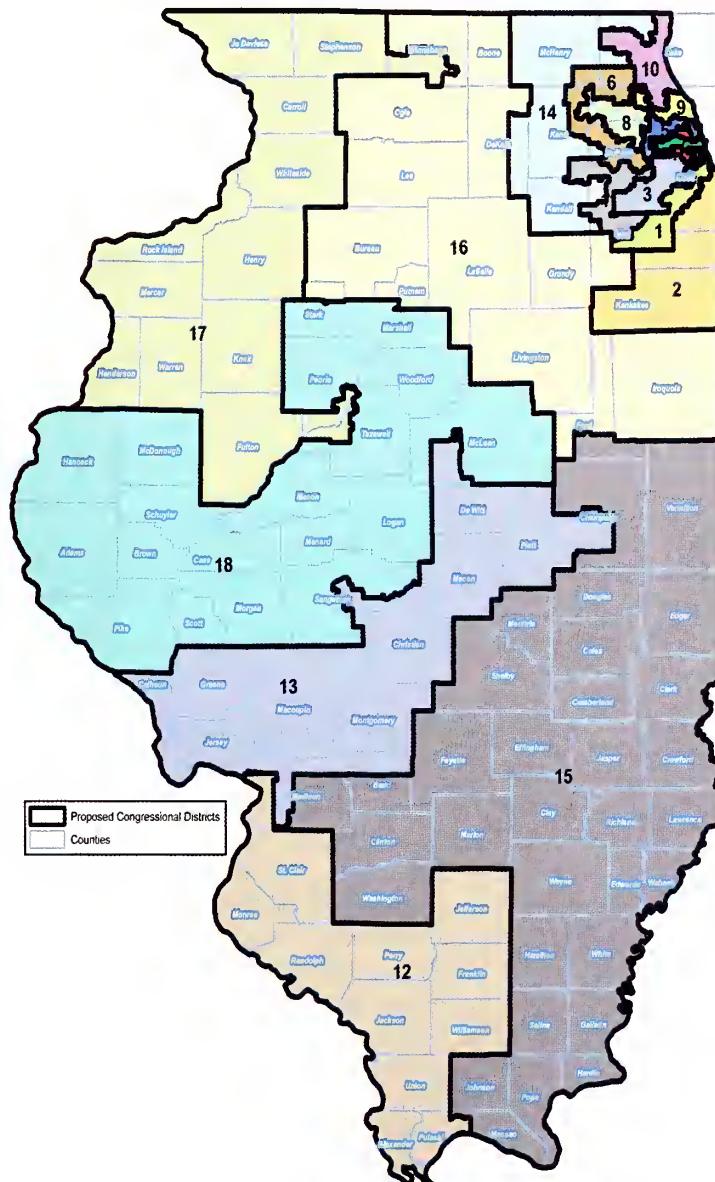
The suits also allege that Democrats used their control of the state legislature and governor's office to

draw irregularly shaped districts with an eye toward winning elections. Illinois Senate President John Cullerton argues that the congressional districts are more compact than the previous map, which was drawn to protect incumbents. "If there's any odd-shaped districts, it's because of the Voting Rights Act," Cullerton says. "It's politically fair, and you'll see that bear out in the next 10 years."

Chris Mooney, a political studies professor with the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois, agrees with Cullerton's take on the congressional map. He says the redistricting process is highly partisan, and if one party is left out of the process because of the power balance of state government, it can be assumed that its members will complain and likely sue.

Jamey Dunn

Proposed Congressional Districts (SB 1178 HA #2)



Legislative redistricting maps can be found at
<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/DistrictMapsII.asp?Site=T>

Capital construction plan spared

Lawmakers avoided the possibility of needing to rework the state's capital construction plan when they return for their fall veto session, scheduled in October. The legislation survived a constitutional challenge and was upheld by the Illinois Supreme Court.

In January, an appellate court affirmed a challenge to the plan from Chicago Blackhawks owner Rocky Wirtz. The lawsuit claimed that the legislation violated the "single subject rule" of the state's Constitution that requires all bills stick to one topic. "The single subject rule is designed to prevent the passage of legislation that, if standing alone, could not muster the necessary votes for enactment," the appellate opinion states, citing an Illinois Supreme Court ruling on a 2005 case. "The practice of bundling less popular legislation with more palatable bills so that the well-received bills would carry the unpopular ones to passage is known as 'logrolling.' In addition to preventing logrolling, the single subject rule also facilitates the enactment of bills through an orderly and informed legislative process."

To fund the construction plan, the law increased sales taxes on a variety of hygiene products, candy, soft drinks and alcoholic beverages, as well as increasing some licensing fees. Wirtz, who also owns liquor distributor Wirtz Beverage, took issue with the tax increase on wine and spirits, which he argued was unfairly greater than the increase on beer.

The most controversial components of the bill allow video poker in bars and restaurants across Illinois and the leasing of the state lottery to a private management firm. The lower court ruled that the funding measure touched on too many issues and needed to be broken down into separate bills. After the plan was struck down, Senate President John Cullerton pushed a \$1-a-pack cigarette tax increase, which he estimated would bring in \$300 million, to replace video poker as a revenue source. "I was never really a big supporter of the video gaming, but we did vote for it. We just haven't made any money on it yet," Cullerton said. However, his plan lacked the needed support, and lawmakers said they would wait for the Supreme Court's decision before they start to tinker with the construction plan.

The Supreme Court ruled that all the provisions in the legislation fell under the single goal of capital construction. "The appellate court held that the single subject of **Public Act 96-34** was revenue, based on its official title, 'An Act concerning revenue,'" the Supreme Court ruling read. "However, defendants assert before this court that the single subject of **Public Act 96-34** is capital projects. Defendants are not limited solely to the contents of the title of an act in offering a single subject rationale. ... Moreover, capital projects is a legitimate single subject, one which is not so broad that the rule is evaded as 'a meaningful constitutional check on the legislature's actions."

A written statement from Wirtz Beverage said: "Our issue was not with the lawmakers but with the law. We said from day one that the arbitrary taxes on wine and spirits were unfair and unconstitutional, as was the manner in which this bill was passed. While we have the utmost respect for our state and its infrastructure needs, we have equal respect for Illinois residents who, as consumers, are now saddled with these unfair taxes. The Supreme Court has spoken, and while we are disappointed with their decision, we respect it."

Quinn, calling the decision "gratifying," told reporters at a news conference: "This means our job recovery program can go forward full speed ahead."

Jamey Dunn



Developmentally disabled win housing struggle

David Cicarelli longingly remembers what it was like to live without three roommates. Thanks to a court settlement he and four other named plaintiffs with developmental disabilities won, it looks like he may have a shot at reducing the number of his roommates in the fall.

The settlement, approved in June, requires the state to offer developmentally disabled residents the option of living in the community in small settings rather than intermediate and large private, state-funded facilities. The court has appointed a monitor. In the meantime, plaintiffs are supposed to have living arrangements set up in the community within 60 days. An additional 6,000 people who want to live in community settings — rather than in facilities with hundreds of residents — are expected to be

placed within the next six years.

An additional 3,000 people who now live at home and who are not receiving services from the state also could get assistance under the agreement.

"It enforces rights people with developmental disabilities have under the Americans with Disabilities Act (and other statutes). What the Americans with Disabilities Act ensures is folks with disabilities — including developmental disabilities, which is our situation — that the government take steps to integrate people with disabilities into mainstream community life to the fullest extent possible," says John Grossbart, a Chicago lawyer who helped represent the five individuals in the suit originally filed in 2005 against the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Department

Insurers must pay for contraceptives

President Barack Obama's administration issued new rules last month that will require insurers to cover the cost of contraceptives as of July 2012.

"When half of pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned, we know family planning services are an essential preventive service for women. These services are critical to appropriately spacing and ensuring intended pregnancies which results in improved maternal health and better birth outcomes," wrote Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of Health and Human Services, in a White House blog post.

The move disturbed a national insurance trade group and anti-abortion activists such as Bill Beckman, executive director of the Illinois Right to Life Committee.

"It's not really something that should be a valid candidate for insurance," says Beckman. "Basically, it's an agenda-driven item that doesn't help to reduce health care costs or to allow people to follow their own conscience."

Planned Parenthood of Illinois hailed the action. "It's historic. It's absolutely a historic victory for women and women's health for women across the country, not only their health but their pocketbooks," says Pam Sutherland, vice president of public policy for Planned Parenthood of Illinois. "For insurance plans, now they are going to have to cover this with no copay and no deductible. It's fabulous for women."

In 2003, then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed into law a mandate that all insurers cover contraceptives. But there were no restrictions on copays, and some were higher than the cost of the contraceptive, Sutherland says.

"The one thing we know at Planned Parenthood is, if women don't have the money for these services, if they can't afford their contraceptive, or if they can't afford to come in for a visit, they just don't. Then we see women who are unhealthier because they waited a



long time. This is wonderful. These women's health insurers are going to cover these important health care procedures."

The new rule, which was based on the recommendations of the federal Institute of Medicine, also requires insurers to cover the cost of "well-woman" and well-baby visits; screening and counseling for violence; testing and counseling for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV; testing for gestational diabetes; and breastfeeding support and supplies.

But there will likely be a costly result, warned Karen Ignagni, president and CEO of the trade group America's Health Insurance Plans. In a prepared release she said: "Unfortunately, the preventive care coverage recommendations recently issued by the IOM would increase the number of unnecessary physician office visits and raise the cost of coverage. The IOM's recommendations would broaden the scope of mandated preventive services beyond existing evidence-based guidelines, suspend current cost-sharing arrangements for certain services, and encourage consumers to obtain a prescription for routine supplies that are currently purchased over the counter."

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

of Healthcare and Family Services. "And in Illinois, with a very, very high use of large, multiple-bed facilities and institutions to house people with developmental disabilities, that's not integration; that's segregation in a sense. People want community options. Illinois has to do more to make those sorts of situations available. ... We sought to rectify that with our lawsuit. Illinois, now under court supervision, will be required to take affirmative steps toward making those options more plentiful and more available."

In an emailed response, Januari Smith, spokeswoman for the two state agencies involved, said: "We are pleased with the settlement, which will open up more community-based care options for people with disabilities who choose it. We want to

thank everyone who came together to put the needs of people with disabilities first. The department has worked hard to reach a settlement and will continue to work diligently with all parties involved."

For Cicarelli, 37, the settlement means he will be allowed to move from the Riverside Foundation, a 96-bed facility in Lincolnshire, into a small group home operated by Clearbrook, which is based in his parents' hometown of Arlington Heights. He had hoped to be there by his September 25 birthday, but his mother, Julianne, says the move is now expected to occur in November.

The move may allow him to work in the community rather than at the Riverside Foundation workshop, as he does now. "Riverside is too big for me," he says.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

Intern finds Lincoln document

David Spriegel was organizing a collection of various papers, including property records, deeds and mortgages, when he found two documents with similar inscriptions stating, "The foregoing memorandum is in the handwriting of Abraham Lincoln. - Milton Hay."

Spriegel, a senior history major at St. Mary's University in Winona, Minn., was working as a summer intern in the manuscripts department at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield.

"My first reaction was really nothing out of the ordinary. I saw the notes, and my first thought was ... this is an organization with countless Lincoln scholars at its disposal. I figured documents like these would have been discovered and preserved years ago," he says.

Spriegel's supervisor advised him to take the documents to the staff of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln project located in the library. Daniel Stowell, director and editor of the project, Stacy Pratt McDermott, the assistant director, and James Cornelius, curator of the Lincoln Collection, confirmed that the documents were in Lincoln's handwriting. (The Papers of Abraham Lincoln is a sister unit to *Illinois Issues* in the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois Springfield.)

Cornelius was able to determine that the documents were from the legal case of *Opdycke et al. v. Godfrey et al.*, which was tried in Christian County in 1844.

The collection has 35 other documents from 1844 in Lincoln's hand and a similar number of documents from the surrounding years, Cornelius says.

"We are very familiar with his [Lincoln's] handwriting, certainly from the mid-1840s on, and it is remarkably consistent for the remainder of his life," Stowell says.

The legal case involved a group of land speculators petitioning

the court over the division of land in that county. Lincoln was one of the petitioners in the case.

The two documents do not bear Lincoln's signature, just a list of property, Stowell says. However, "it's another example of Lincoln as a detail-oriented lawyer," he says.

Milton Hay had clerked in the Stuart and Lincoln Law Office in Springfield, which enabled him to identify Lincoln's handwriting, Spriegel says.

At least one of Hay's ancestors was purchasing the land that Lincoln was notating in the two documents. Cornelius suspects that Hay wrote his note later in his life, possibly the 1880s. Hay was likely the family record keeper and had the documents sitting around the house because he was an attorney, he says.

"This is a case in which there are at least a couple of good, legal, logical explanations for why they were in the hands of Milton Hay along with a whole bunch of land titles," Cornelius says.

It was also typical of what many people were doing in the decades following Lincoln's death, going through things looking to see what connection they still had to Lincoln, he says.

The documents will be scanned and added to the website of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln this fall. The website contains copies of 5,600 of Lincoln's legal cases.

Spriegel says he has learned some valuable lessons during his internship.

"The thing that I will take away most is that I will never know the connections that I am going to be able to make between a historical figure or event and the primary documents that I handle."

"If these two documents did not bear any notes by Milton Hay describing that the handwriting was that of Abraham Lincoln, these would have lain in the manuscripts stacks for years, possibly to be discovered by another researcher in the future."

Kendall Cramer

Driving while minority

Minority drivers in Illinois were more likely in 2010 to be stopped by police and more likely to be asked to submit to consent searches, a recent report shows.

Minority drivers were 12 percent more likely to be pulled over by police, according to the study released in July. After those stops, citations were issued to minority drivers 63 percent of the time, while 55 percent of whites received tickets.

The Center for Law and Justice at the University of Illinois Chicago analyzed 2.4 million traffic stops by almost 1,000 police agencies in Illinois. The study is the result of a 2003 law championed by then state-Sen. Barack Obama.

After the report, the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois reiterated its June request for a federal civil rights investigation into the number of consent searches of minority drivers that were sought by the Illinois State Police. The ACLU contends that because drivers almost always submit to consent searches, they are not a matter of choice.

"The state of Illinois has released another year of data that makes clear that consent searches by the ISP are conducted in a racially disparate manner," Harvey Grossman, legal director for the ACLU of Illinois, said in a prepared statement. "This is not a one-year phenomenon. These results are consistent with data released each year since 2004. It is time for the political leadership in Illinois to

act and end this practice on our highways and roads across the state."

In response, Gov. Pat Quinn in June asked the Illinois State Police to conduct a study to explain why minorities were more likely to be asked by officers to submit to a consent search.

As of press time, the study was not complete. "As you can imagine, we are still in the process of reviewing the data. We hope to have preliminary information very soon," says State Police spokeswoman Monique Bond. "What's certain is that Director [Hiram] Grau is very serious about getting to the bottom on a number of issues that include accountability, training and consistency."

At the time the report was released in July, Grau said in a prepared release: "The Illinois State Police does not encourage, tolerate or condone the use of racial profiling at any level. As a leader, I expect myself and my command staff to treat the public with professionalism and respect."

When the Illinois State Police stopped white drivers, 88 percent submitted to consent searches, while 94 percent of minorities permitted the searches.

State police tickets were issued to 56 percent of white drivers and 61 percent of minorities.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney



In Aurora

Adjustment

Feature

Latinos and the suburbs where they settle deal with a changing reality by Daniel C. Vock

As the leader of a nonprofit group that helps Latino families in western Lake County, Carolina Duque knows how difficult it can be for poor immigrants to live in the suburbs. The challenges start with the immigrants' limited ability to speak English and their low levels of schooling. But what makes those problems worse are the barriers that prevent her clients from adapting to their new surroundings.

Lately, for example, Duque ran into problems trying to get her clients to earn high school equivalency degrees. Her group, Mano a Mano Family Resource Center in Round Lake Park, works with the local community college to help students get those degrees, which can lead to better jobs. But a federal law prevents more of her clients from getting the right classes.

Most of Mano a Mano's predominantly Mexican clients did not get far in school before they dropped out or moved to the United States. Many of them did not even make it to high school. But GED programs — even those taught in Spanish — require incoming students to start off with entry-level high school skills. Students who need to learn basic literacy and arithmetic must take Adult Basic Education classes first. But federal law prevents the basic classes, which are funded with state and federal money, from being taught in Spanish.

That requirement ties the hands of administrators at the College of Lake County, which offers Spanish GED classes with Mano a Mano. "I want to provide them (Mano a Mano) whatever I can, so they can spend their money on tutoring and mentoring, helping people get jobs

and housing," says Mary Charuhas, the community college's dean of adult education. "But one area where I can't help is literacy in Spanish."

It is just one item on a long list of obstacles that make it harder for recent Latino immigrants and their children to fully integrate into American society. Unlike previous waves of immigrants, the current surge of new Hispanics is largely heading straight to the suburbs and bypassing traditional gateway cities like Chicago. That means that suburban schools, police, hospitals and elected officials are now grappling with issues that they have little experience dealing with.

"The suburbs are not necessarily as prepared as cities are to receive large numbers of immigrants," says Mano a Mano's Duque. The new suburban diversity is not just ethnic, it is economic. "The suburbs are now home to a wide variety of poor people," write researchers from the Brookings Institute in Washington. "That includes foreign born and native born, all races, people who lack a high school degree as well as college graduates. The suburbanization of poverty is now a defining characteristic of the American metropolis. And it is accelerating."

Cheap suburban housing is a major draw for the new arrivals, but often, affordable rents are found far from bus routes, schools with bilingual teachers and even the jobs that are drawing immigrants in the first place.

Hispanics now make up 15 percent of all Illinoisans. While the rest of the state's population stagnated in the last decade, the size of the Latino population grew by half a million people, or a third. The rest of the state lost 86,000 people. Hispanics' economic presence is growing, too. One estimate concluded that between 1990 and 2008, Hispanics increased their buying power in Illinois from \$8.8 billion to \$40.9 billion. In public school classrooms in the decade prior to 2008, the number of Latino students grew by 60 percent. The 2010 census showed that the Hispanic population grew in every corner of the state. Pulaski County in far southern Illinois was the only county where their numbers did not increase during the last decade.

The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that 525,000 immigrants in Illinois — mostly from Mexico — are in the country illegally. But last decade, for the first time, immigration came in a distant second nationally as a cause for the growth of the Mexican-American population, behind births. The center estimated the nation saw 4.2 million new Mexican immigrants, compared with 7.2 million Mexican-American births.



In Illinois, three-quarters of the Hispanic growth in the 2000s came from the Chicago suburbs. The city of Chicago saw an uptick of 25,000 Hispanics in the last decade, according to the census. In the rest of Cook County and the collar counties, though, the Hispanic population increased by more than 375,000. Roughly three-fifths of Illinois Hispanics now live in the suburbs.

The demographic shift affects core functions of state and local governments. As a group, Illinois Hispanics are poorer than the general population. Their median income of \$21,600 is below that of African-Americans and less than two-thirds that of whites. More than a quarter of Illinois Latinos have no health insurance, twice the rate of whites. Hispanics have lower levels of education, but because they often have bigger families, their kids make up an increasingly bigger share of the classrooms in the state. Newer immigrants, especially, often do not know English or the ins-and-outs of dealing with American hospitals, police and schools. The large presence of immigrants who are in the country illegally is an issue, not just for the unauthorized immigrants themselves, but also for their American children, spouses and friends.

The Round Lake area, where Mano a Mano is located, has seen a dramatic rise in the Latino population since the agency opened its doors in 2000. The Hispanic population in Round Lake Beach, for example, jumped by nearly 70 percent. Latinos now make up nearly half of the village's residents.

But Duque, Mano a Mano's executive director, says Latino concerns are still not a top priority for many local leaders. Many wonder why they should "cater" to their new neighbors. When she asks

what they are doing to address the needs of immigrants in the area, many simply highlight the work of her own group, a relatively small nonprofit with a budget of roughly \$500,000. Forums at chamber of commerce events rarely address immigration, Duque says, and few Latino leaders get involved with local civic activities. "You know, institutions don't adapt easily to demographic change," she says. "Of course, there's a lot of pressure on every institution in the community."

At the College of Lake County, adapting means considering not just the type of classes offered but where they are held. The community college has greatly expanded the number of classes it offers in English as a second language, and two types of innovative classes attract many enthusiastic Latino students as well, says Charuhas. One program targets families, especially women staying home with their children. Teachers work simultaneously with young kids preparing for kindergarten and their parents preparing to rejoin the workforce. A separate initiative integrates GED classes with professional certifications in areas such as health, auto repair, office management and heating, ventilation and air conditioning repair.

Even with several class locations throughout the county, though, making sure students can get to class is a major consideration. Poor families may either have no car or a single car that usually goes with the working parent. Plus, unauthorized immigrants cannot get driver's licenses in Illinois (only New Mexico, Utah and Washington state permit them to drive). So the College of Lake County's classes must be held on a bus route and, preferably, where people can walk to class, as well. "This is not a county that is good for transportation," Charuhas says.

Even where transportation is better, distance is an obstacle. Michelle Meyer, executive director of Mutual Ground, which serves victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, points out that her organization covers much more geographic territory than just its home city of Aurora, a common situation for suburban nonprofits. While Pace bus service may serve Aurora well, there is no public transportation in several other areas of Kane and Kendall counties where other Mutual Ground clients live.

The distance between Mutual Ground and other service providers can be a problem, too. For example, Meyer says, federal law allows many victims of domestic abuse to get immigration relief to encourage them to report crimes. The problem, Meyer says, is that almost all the immigration lawyers who handle those cases work in Chicago,

In Illinois, three-quarters of the Hispanic growth in the 2000s came from the Chicago suburbs. ... Roughly three-fifths of Illinois Hispanics now live in the suburbs.

which can be a long haul from Kane or Kendall counties without a car.

Closer to home, just getting an order of protection at the courthouse can be a daunting task. Court interpreters are in short supply. "Without an advocate, a person who speaks Spanish only would have a lot of difficulty going through that process," Meyer says. "It's extremely important for them to come to Mutual Ground to get our court advocacy services because the order of protection paperwork is in English. Most of the attorneys speak only English. Most of the judges speak only English."

This spring, Gov. Pat Quinn announced he was withdrawing the state of Illinois from the federal Secure Communities program, which screens criminal suspects for immigration offenses. Quinn said the program caught too many low-level offenders and prevented police from earning the trust of victims and witnesses. The federal government later said states cannot withdraw from the program.

Fear of deportation prevents many domestic abuse and assault victims from coming forward, Meyer says, even if the one who could be deported is the person they are accusing of abuse. While that may sound strange, she explains, the abuser is often the woman's only source of income and the father of her children.

Another big problem for nonprofits serving Latino clients is the difficulty of keeping bilingual staff. Talented workers are often lured away by other nonprofits or by private companies that need people who can speak both English and Spanish. It's even harder to keep those employees because Illinois state government, which pays for many of the services the nonprofits offer, is often as much as six months behind on the bills.

Sylvia Puente, executive director of the Latino Policy Forum in Chicago (and an *Illinois Issues* Advisory Board member), argues that years of level state funding for social programs that serve Hispanics actually amounts to a cut because it comes at a time when the need among Latinos has



increased with their numbers. But with the state's finances in shambles, neither Puente nor anyone else contacted for this article expected much relief for service providers anytime soon.

These days, few human service providers are getting what they need to operate, and lawmakers are not thinking at a strategic level about how to allocate state money, says Judith Gethner, director of Illinois Partners for Human Service, an umbrella group of providers. Latino groups are rightfully upset, but so, too, are groups that serve the disabled or the addicted. "You have groups that are trying to be heard," Gethner says, "at a time when the noise level is just at an outrageous decibel level."

Still, there are many areas where Latinos do not receive the state resources their population numbers would suggest. That is true for state legislative seats, state employees and state contracts. One of the thorny issues for Hispanic leaders, though, is that it is often their political allies who control those resources.

Take legislative redistricting, which determines in large part how many General Assembly seats are controlled by Hispanic voters. A coalition of Latino groups determined that by population alone, Hispanics should have 28 state House and Senate districts. In reality, though, mapmakers could not create that many districts that would be roughly two-thirds Hispanic, because the population is too spread out. The best case scenario, the coalition decided, would be 13 Hispanic-controlled districts. The Democratic map signed by the governor, though, barely had half that many. In addition to the seven Latino districts, the plan also has a handful where Latinos made up a majority of the population but not by the decisive margins that mapmakers use to give an ethnic group control.

The coalition offered muted praise for the map, noting that it included more Hispanic districts than the current plan. Some civil rights groups, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, opposed the map, but it is unclear whether they would go to court to fight it (MALDEF did not return calls seeking comment). Republican legislative leaders sued to block the map, claiming, among other things, that it was unfair to Hispanic voters, but, as of this writing, no Latino groups have joined the effort.

When it comes to state workers, Hispanics are underrepresented, too. The number of Hispanic state employees was just under 4.5 percent at the end of 2010, compared with 16 percent of the

state's population at large. (African-Americans, by comparison, held 21 percent of state jobs and comprise 15 percent of the population.) Furthermore, according to the Illinois Department of Central Management Services, the number of bilingual state workers is even smaller. They make up 2.5 percent of state employees, and half of them work for the Department of Human Services.

The low number of bilingual employees means those staffers have significantly higher caseloads than their colleagues — and their clients must wait longer, Puente argues. Plus, not having Hispanics in state government means fewer people will speak up if a proposal would disproportionately affect Latinos, such as closing a state office in a Hispanic neighborhood. "If we don't have people who understand Latinos sitting in every state agency and in the governor's office," she says, "it doesn't help us close those disparities."

But Addison Mayor Larry Hartwig, who has worked with Puente on many issues, stresses the need for building unity among groups. In Addison, which is 40 percent Hispanic, summer concerts feature music from not only Mexico but also from Poland, Italy and India. The local high school has worked hard to engage Hispanic parents by offering child care and transportation to Saturday morning meetings, says Hartwig, a former principal. But the efforts also included combining the Hispanic parents' group with one run predominantly by white parents.

In the late 1990s, early in Hartwig's tenure as mayor, Addison settled a lawsuit brought by the federal government charging that a neighborhood revitalization effort for a residential area was really a way to clear out the Mexican-Americans who were settling in the area. Hartwig argues that fights such as that built resentment between long-time residents and the growing Hispanic population. "That's exactly what I've heard: Why are we catering to them?" he says. "Well, we are trying to help them become part of us rather than having them living separately from us."

Although he says there is still a long way to go, Hartwig says the efforts have started to pay off. A few years ago, a man told the mayor he had just moved his family from a nearby suburb to Addison because he wanted his children to live in a diverse community and meet students from different backgrounds in school. "That's the world we're living in," Hartwig recalls the man saying. He adds, "I guess that's what I'm hoping we eventually get to." ☐

Daniel C. Vock is a reporter for the Washington, D.C.-based Stateline.org.

Localized disease

When the state budget suffers, municipalities feel the pain, too

by Jamey Dunn

"I told them, 'It's going to get worse before it's going to get better,'" Sen. John Sullivan, a Democrat from Rushville said of a recent string of a dozen town hall meetings where he explained state budget cuts to voters in his district.

After lawmakers trimmed the state budget this spring, local governments — many of which have seen their own budget shortfalls during the recent economic crisis — will feel an even greater pinch as the reductions trickle down.

"As the state gets sicker and sicker financially, it's just like the flu. If Springfield is sick, I'll guarantee you most local and county governments will catch it, too," says Bill Black, a Danville alderman and former Republican state representative. "The rubber meets the road in a local government first. That's where most people get their services ... [and] they get their first taste of reductions of services at the local level." Danville, an east-central Illinois city of more than 32,000 residents, has kept its budget balanced through the economic downturn.

Personnel has been one of the areas hardest hit as local officials have tried to keep their budgets in line. "About 70 to 80 percent of municipal budgets are people," says Karen Darch, Barrington village president. Barrington is a northwestern suburb of Chicago with a few more than 10,000 residents. Darch says her village has cut its workforce by 20 percent during the last three years. Some of the reduction came from leaving positions vacant as workers left or retired, but some employees were laid off as well. "That meant people picking up work — those who stayed trying to fill the gaps," she says. "Then, maybe you don't get as much done as you might have. It hasn't been easy, and yet we know that we have to balance our budget."

Barrington has managed to stay in the black through the recession. Darch says the village board took note of diminishing tax receipts and started in on cuts quickly. "They were saying, 'Look we're seeing the decline, so we need to get a handle on our revenues.' I think our board got a jump on reducing staff and cutting expenses."

Barrington is also saving money by automating services, such as allowing residents to pay parking tickets and water bills online. "In the last few years, we've gotten that really perfected." But she notes that some jobs will always require a human touch. "When the pothole has to get filled or the sewer line has to be repaired, there's hands-on work every day."

It is exactly these workers that local governments have been laying off en masse, says Joe McCoy, legislative director for the Illinois Municipal League. Municipalities have given pink slips to employees in their clerical, administrative, public works and other service departments to avoid cuts to public safety employees. "The big concern this year is there really isn't much more you can cut without getting absolutely vital core services that people expect," he says.

McCoy says the layoffs of police and fire personnel throughout the state are indicators that local officials have run out of things to cut. "When we start to see massive layoffs of public safety employees, we know we are really scraping the bottom of the barrel."



Black, who served as a county official for a decade before entering state politics, says many smaller rural communities are looking to their county sheriff and the Illinois State Police to help pick up some of the slack. "Many counties, they don't want people to know how many cars they have on duty from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. They can't park their sheriff's cars and open up a substation in every small community in Illinois."

McCoy predicts more public safety cuts to come. "I think we are going to see very large numbers of police officers and firefighters laid off ... because it is the last possible place to go. ... It could get really ugly out there if the economy doesn't improve."

Education is another high profile area of government that local officials say is suffering under state budget cuts. Transportation funds, which the state uses to reimburse districts for busing kids to school, were cut 42 percent in Fiscal Year 2011, which ended June 30. The FY 2012 budget approved by the General Assembly would put back some transportation funds, but Gov. Pat Quinn used his veto pen to remove \$89 million in transportation dollars restored by lawmakers. Legislators, however, could still override his cuts.

"Is it a state responsibility to make sure the kids get to school? Or is that a local district responsibility, a parental responsibility, to get the kids to school?" asks Quinn's budget director, David Vaught. "This is not the highest priority when you weigh objectives and priorities against one to the other. And so, we see a cut here. ... We think the districts and the parents can handle that on their own." Quinn says it is all about making tough choices at a time when schools are also facing cuts to early childhood education and general state aid. He says he wants to shift state spending to the classroom.

But Mathew Plater, superintendent of the Schuyler-Industry district in western Illinois, says because the state dictates the requirements for busing students to school — along with a ream of other state-mandated requirements on schools — local districts do not get to prioritize their dollars in the same way. "By law, we have to provide [transportation]. We don't have choices." At 424 square miles, Plater's recently consolidated district is geographically the second largest in the state. The district closed one elementary school this year, which Plater says saved about \$500,000, and eliminated one bus route. The district has also gotten rid of some buses, and the ones it kept are smaller.

Plater says the only way left to save money would be to lengthen the students' bus rides, which are now often up to an hour or more. If lawmakers do not override Quinn's veto when they are back in session this fall, he says his district will have to dip into general state aid funds to pay for buses next fiscal year. "We're deficit-spending our transportation fund by about \$300,000 this year." As with many other funds owed to local governments and school districts, the state is late making reimbursement payments. "We're halfway through the year before we even start to get the money. ... If they wanted to get square, they owe us six payments," Plater says. "We've been in this boat of them not having the money to pay for things for about four years now."

Quinn also used his veto pen to cut salaries for regional superintendents. Those administrators oversee Regional Offices of Education, whose responsibilities include school safety inspections, teacher certifications and alternative schools for struggling students. Quinn says if local districts want regional superintendents, they should pay them from local revenues. Again, Quinn says he is trying to shift dollars to classrooms by freeing money up for general state aid. The budget that lawmakers approved in May included a reduction to general state aid that will become more severe near the end of the fiscal year. Some legislators close to the education budgeting process hope to find additional revenues before then to stave off the cut.

To restore funding for regional superintendents, lawmakers would have to override Quinn's veto, so regional superintendents are stuck in budget limbo for now. "What they're doing right now is that they have decided to continue to work, even though they are not getting paid," says Michael Chamness, spokesman for the Illinois Association of School Administrators. He says regional superintendents wanted to help districts start the school year smoothly, but they cannot continue to work for no pay indefinitely.

Plater says that the budget crunch on many districts makes regional superintendents all the more necessary because someone who is not concerned with the budget bottom line needs to make sure that schools are refilling their fire extinguishers and keeping their bleachers up to code. "The problem is that nobody will be watching. ... You're going to start getting people who are trying to cut corners and save money."

Chamness says that transportation cuts and pushing the cost of Regional Offices of Education onto local districts will force schools to spend general state aid on such expenses. “The end result is going to be taking money out of the classroom.”

School districts may also soon be scrambling to find a way to pay for their employees’ pensions. The state currently foots the bill through the Teachers’ Retirement System. However, Senate President John Cullerton has called for local districts to assume that responsibility. He argues that state government should not have to pay for local employees’ pensions, which are based on salary decisions made at the local level. He also says it is only fair because Chicago Public Schools picks up the bulk of its pension costs.

“I can understand why John’s looking at something because those unfunded pension liabilities are just eating the [state] budget alive,” Black says. “There’s no way, unless there is a local revenue source that I am unaware of, that 800 school districts could finance the Illinois Teachers’ Retirement System.”

Black says moving such costs to the local level will eventually mean an increase in property taxes. “If there’s a tax that everybody universally hates, it’s the property tax.”

But tax increases are not a universal solution. Different taxing bodies across the state have various limits on what taxes they can impose and how much they can ask for. Non-home rule communities, which wield less local power, have few options for expanding their tax base to items outside sales or property taxes. “If you’re home rule, you can do anything that isn’t explicitly prohibited by [state] statute. If you’re non-home rule, you can only do things that are explicitly included in statute,” says McCoy. Out of approximately 1,300 municipalities, only 206 have home rule powers, according to the Illinois Municipal League. Barrington is a non-home rule community, but Darch says that even if villages like hers had broader taxing powers, “people aren’t going to vote for a tax increase.” Black agrees. “In the middle of this recession? You can’t be serious.”

Local revenues could have fared much worse under the new budget if lawmakers had approved a proposal by Quinn to reduce the share of income tax dollars the state sends back to municipalities. Local officials and the Illinois Municipal League launched a successful lobbying effort and media campaign to push back against the cuts, and Quinn backpedaled from the idea. But McCoy says as long as Illinois is running a budget deficit, lawmakers may consider skimming

from the fund to patch up the state budget. “It’s going to be a perpetual [sword of] Damocles hanging over our heads.”

“Local governments get a lot of money from the state, most of which is done kind of more implicitly than explicitly,” says David Merriman, an economics professor and associate director of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois. In FY 2010, the state filtered about \$1.2 billion back to municipal governments through the Local Government Distributive Fund. Merriman says it would be irresponsible for local officials not to consider that they may lose some of those dollars.

Sullivan says that as Congress tries to balance its budget, the outlook for municipalities gets even worse. He says trillions in federal cuts — included in the compromise package to raise the debt ceiling — begin in October with the new fiscal year and will eventually hit home in the cities, towns and villages of Illinois. “It’s just like a domino effect. When the feds cut money to the states, the states ultimately have to cut money to local government. We’re put into a very difficult situation.”

Rather than increasing taxes, some local governments are looking to share services with their neighbors to cut costs. “Cities and villages, mayors and city councils have also learned a lesson from this,” says Gerald Bennett, mayor of Palos Hills. “We learned how even greater efficiency can take place.” Palos Hills, a southern suburb of Chicago with more than 17,500 residents, ran a budget deficit from 2008 to 2010. Both Palos Hills and Barrington share emergency dispatching services with nearby communities. Bennett says it saved his city about \$100,000.

“You’re going to have to learn to share,” Black says of local governments. He says legislators must seriously consider proposals such as a recent plan from Sen. Terry Link to eliminate some of Illinois’ almost 7,000 taxing bodies and Quinn’s pitch to consolidate more school districts. **Senate Bill 173**, the proposal by Link, a Democrat from Waukegan, received a meager 14 “yes” votes out of a possible 59 when called in the Senate.

Black acknowledges that it is difficult for towns to compromise on shared services when they have always done things a certain way. Consolidation of taxing bodies and school districts can make residents fearful of losing their identity as a community — especially when it comes to long-beloved traditions, such as local sports. “If Danville wouldn’t play Champaign in football, I think the world would end,” Black quips. ☺

by Sarah Karp

Education reform

How widely Senate Bill 7 sweeps depends on whom you ask

Some of the most powerful voices — from the mayor of Chicago to the governor of Illinois — have called **Senate Bill 7** sweeping education reform legislation. But the Chicago Teachers Union's leadership says the changes in the bill, which passed the General Assembly in the spring, are not that big a deal.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel counts **SB 7** as his first significant legislative victory, pointing to the fact that he can now lengthen the school day without approval from the union. "We are now going to have the ability to do what we have denied the kids of Chicago generation after generation," Emanuel said in a news release when Gov. Pat Quinn signed the bill.

Lengthening the school day was the unfinished business of Emanuel's friend Arne Duncan, the former Chicago Public Schools CEO and current U.S. education secretary. Duncan once said his greatest regret as CPS CEO was that he was unable to get the union to concede to lengthening the school day.

With 170 days of school and five hours and 45 minutes in a typical school day, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has one of the shortest school days among big city school systems. But the last time Duncan sat down with the teachers union to negotiate the contract, Duncan's boss, then-Mayor Richard M. Daley, wanted labor peace as he prepared for a bid for the Olympics. Daley got his calm, but the school day stayed the same.

To state Sen. Kimberly Lightford, a Democrat whose district includes some of Chicago and the western suburbs, the addition to the school day is the biggest change for CPS. "If you can go from giving students 35 minutes of reading to 50 minutes, that is a big deal," she says. "It is paramount to give these students more time."

But studies have shown that lengthening the school day is not a panacea for improving the academic performance of students. School districts must be thoughtful in their approach so they can use the time wisely.

Also, lengthening the school day and year could be expensive. While Emanuel can unilaterally lengthen the school day, it is unclear whether he must pay teachers for the extra time or whether teachers can strike if he refuses to. That is a central question, considering that CPS is grappling with a deep deficit that is projected to be worse in coming years.

Union officials say teachers can potentially strike over this issue. Although they rebut the idea that CPS' school day and year is significantly shorter than in other big cities, they say they are open to some extension. Lightford, who led the negotiations on the legislation, agrees with the union that it could potentially strike over the issue, but others think they are wrong.

In 2003, the Chicago Teachers Union agreed that it can only strike over a small number of issues, and pay for an extended school day is not one of them, says Jessica Handy, Illinois policy director for Stand for Children, an advocacy group that was at the table during negotiations. Stand for Children is a well-heeled group from Oregon that helped strategize for the passage of **SB 7**.

She says a disagreement over pay during extra time would go through a different mediation process. "We would expect for the CTU to respect that," Handy says.

Handy says that Stand for Children doesn't have a position on whether teachers should be paid for the extra time. "It is up to the adults to figure out," she says.

Emanuel and the current CPS CEO Jean-Claude Brizard could be cooking up some other way to extend the school day that would not entail having teachers in front of students. Last year, a small pilot program kept students in school later by having them participate in a computer-based class with a teacher's aide to mind them. Other school districts have brought in community organizations to provide music, art or tutoring during the school day.

Outside of extending the school day, **SB 7** mostly tackles teacher-related labor issues. To the extent that one believes that bad teachers are at the root of Chicago Public Schools' woes, **SB 7** could be seen as a game-changer. But the protections that teachers once enjoyed have been dissipating for a while, and the idea that there's a cadre of Chicago teachers who are allowed to grow old and lazy and that the union shields them is somewhat outdated.

For one thing, unionized CPS teachers have been decreasing. Over the past decade, more than 70 charter schools opened in Chicago and more than 50 traditional neighborhood schools have closed. About 10 percent of CPS teachers now work in charter schools, few of which are unionized.

Like most workers, charter school teachers are at-will employees who can be fired for almost anything. They also generally work longer hours than CPS teachers and get paid a bit less.

Charter schools aren't the only force eroding teachers' unions. In 2006, CPS started doing something called "turnarounds." Turnarounds entailed going into the district's worst schools and firing all the teachers and making them reapply, regardless of seniority or even acumen.

Then last year, faced with a looming deficit, then-Chicago Public Schools CEO Ron Huberman announced he was instructing principals to first lay off teachers with unsatisfactory ratings, then those with little seniority. He and his staff said state law already gave them the power to consider "other factors" when doing layoffs. The CTU is still in court challenging the layoffs, though it is more a process-oriented case than one that takes on the place of seniority in layoffs.

Though seen as die-hards and militants, CTU's current leadership came to the table with the knowledge that these pressures were on them.

Lightford says that **SB 7** is the culmination of work that has been happening for years. Previous CTU leadership also set the precedent by being involved in negotiations over legislation needed to improve Illinois' bid for a federal Race to the Top grant.

When it came to negotiations for **SB 7**, the CTU agreed to



In June at Livingston Elementary School in Maywood, Gov. Pat Quinn signs Senate Bill 7, which concerns education reform.



State Rep. Kimberly Lightford, Democrat of Maywood, speaks at the bill signing ceremony about the legislation, which she spearheaded.

provisions that would make it harder to win tenure and made it unequivocally clear that poor evaluations could be used as a key factor in deciding who gets laid off first.

In the past, Chicago teachers who survived three years of probation were automatically granted tenure. Now, teachers must get three straight years of excellent evaluations, or two of four years — including the fourth year — of excellent or proficient ratings.

Robin Steans, executive director of the education advocacy group Advance Illinois, says that the big deal as it pertains to tenure and dismissal is only tangentially related to **SB 7**. The passage of the Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010 (PERA) is what will drive fundamental change.

That legislation calls for school districts to revamp their teacher evaluation systems. It requires half a teacher's evaluation to be based on value-added test scores, which measure how much students have improved in one class compared with other similar classes.



Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel was a major backer of school reform legislation.

CPS must implement PERA by 2013 at all of its schools, and the rest of the state's school districts must do it by 2016. The Chicago district is already piloting a new evaluation system.

Another area where there is debate about significance of the change is over strikes. Recently, the strike issue has become a critical one. In June, the Chicago Board of Education voted to rescind the 4 percent raises promised in the last contract. The teachers' union and the seven other unions immediately demanded that negotiations over the raises be opened up.

Eventually, teachers could strike over the raise issue. Also, next year, the teachers' five-year contract ends, and the union and district will have to hammer out another one.

In the past, the Chicago Teachers Union, like all unions, would call a strike when a majority of their members who voted approved it. **SB 7** sets standards for when CTU can call a strike. Under the law, if the district and the union come to an impasse, a panel from the Educational Labor Relations Board will look at the last offers made by the board of education, and the CTU and publish those offers. The panel will then study the offers and try to determine exactly what each side is saying. From that process, the panel has 75 days to come up with a resolution and present it.

If the CTU isn't satisfied with the resolution, it can then call a strike vote. Lightford says the legislation was originally written so that the union would need two-thirds of all bargaining members to approve a strike in order to call one. But at the last minute, she

says, Stand for Children demanded it should be changed to three-fourths. Stand for Children is a group that raised \$3 million from such wealthy people as Penny Pritzker and Sam Zell and contributed to lawmakers' campaigns.

The thinking by Stand for Children leadership was that the hurdle of 75 percent will be impossible for the teachers union to get over, Jonah Edelman, the executive director of Stand for Children, explained in a speech before the Aspen Institute, a Colorado-based public policy center. In the speech, which set off controversy, he noted that in the past, the union went on strike with far fewer votes.

Handy says she thinks Edelman overstated the case, but she said **SB 7** sends a clear message. "A strike should be seen as a true last resort," Handy says.

Indeed, in the 1980s — a decade in which Chicago teachers went on seven strikes — fewer than 5,000 of nearly 30,000 unionized teachers participated in the votes, though more than 90 percent of those who voted approved the measures. Brown notes that CPS administrators often put up barriers to prevent members from voting, such as locking the doors at schools. That forced teachers to go downtown to vote.

Brown also points out that strikes are only effective if most members abide by it and, during all the CTU strikes, more than 97 percent of teachers picketed or stayed home. Brown says she thinks it is definitely possible for the union to muster up the votes to go on strike, especially since teachers will realize that not showing up will be paramount to a no vote.

Lightford points out that the Chicago Teachers Union did not lose its ability to strike, or perhaps more important, to threaten a strike. In the past, threatening to strike has forced the school district to make a lot compromises, Lightford says.

With charter schools breathing down the necks of teachers and a general attitude that teachers are at the heart of the nation's education problems, teachers unions' leadership most likely understood the environment and knew it was best to compromise. Lightford notes that the other unions in the state also were around the table. But Lightford has an optimistic view of why Chicago Teachers Union president Karen Lewis was willing to hammer out a deal. She says she thinks Lewis knew it was the right thing to do for children.

"She did an awesome job on behalf of teachers and she did an awesome job on behalf of children," Lightford says. "The fact that she did not fight everything was very, very good." ■

Sarah Karp is deputy editor of the Catalyst-Chicago.

roughly the same average scores in 1998 and 2006 for eighth- and 12th-graders.

The percentage of eighth-graders and high school seniors who performed at or above the “basic” level in civics also stayed the same — 72 percent and 64 percent, respectively — compared with the previous assessments. In another silver lining provided by fourth-graders, 77 percent of those students performed at or above the basic level, a small improvement from the two earlier assessment periods (69 percent in 1998 and 73 percent in 2006).

“It’s a little bit alarming,” says Tonya Miles, a National Assessment Governing Board member who helped unveil the latest civics results in May. “From my viewpoint, I’m trying to look at a long-term trend, a hopeful trend. I’m hoping we’re building a pipeline of students from the fourth grade.”

Students with “advanced” abilities in civics continue to be rare, the 2010 tests indicate. Just 2 percent of fourth-graders, 1 percent of eighth-graders and 4 percent of 12th-graders achieved that comparatively sophisticated level.

Exactly what is good civics education?

The subject should span a student’s entire K-12 education and not just surface in later grades, proponents say. The basics should cover the U.S. Constitution and an explanation of how government works at the federal, state and local levels. But just as important, civics boosters say, are critical-thinking exercises that inspire students to discuss and debate public policies, even controversial ones. The best civics programs, advocates say, also include opportunities for students to participate in hands-on activities that demonstrate good citizenship.

Illinois doesn’t obligate schools to do nearly so much. The state’s education code imposes the requirement that publicly supported schools teach “patriotism” and “principles of representative government” and the U.S. and state constitutions. A student cannot graduate “without passing a satisfactory examination upon such subjects,” the law states.

Critics say the vagueness of the statute allows public schools to roll civics into other classes, such as history or social studies, and to administer weak constitutional exams. At best, observers say, Illinois is a mixed bag, with some districts — typically in the more affluent Chicago suburbs — providing excellent civics education, while other school systems get by with the bare minimum.

“I have to admit, there’s some apathy toward civic education in general at the high school level here. I would say it’s in the culture,” says Marc Kiehna, regional schools superintendent for Monroe and Randolph counties. “We’re hoping through some of the things we’re doing, we can maybe make a dent in that.”

Civics education boosters hold out hope that Illinois lawmakers can be persuaded to raise the bar, as was done in Florida last year. Legislators there voted to require a semester of civics at the middle school level and obligated schools to roll civics into the language arts curriculum at all grade levels. The new law was named after former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, a leading civics advocate who helped launch an interactive educational website, iCivics.org, for young people.

Building better citizens isn’t rocket science, civics advocates say

State Rep. William Davis, a Hazel Crest Democrat, says he catches the attention of teens pretty quickly when he asks them a simple question at career days: How would they feel if the minimum driving age was raised to 18?

“I say, ‘Guess who makes that decision?’ And they kind of look at me like, ‘Who makes that decision?’ And I go, ‘Well, I do, as a state elected official,’ ” Davis says. “I use that to try to show how someone like me can make a decision that impacts them. They’ve got to see the correlation.”

If young people don’t understand how government works, they can’t participate as enlightened citizens when they grow up. But given the rancor in Washington, D.C., and history of government corruption in Illinois, can we really blame students if they don’t want to tune in?

Civics education advocates concede the adults in charge leave something to be desired. But they also insist that young people find public policy fascinating in the right learning environment. And they can even learn a seemingly forgotten skill: how to agree to disagree.

“Some of our elected officials, some of our appointed officials, aren’t civic role models. We need to be, and we need to teach our students to be better,” says Shawn Healy, resident scholar for the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and chairman of the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition. “Schools are the perfect place to be having conversations about controversial issues. We can have substantive conversations, we can disagree vehemently, but the other side’s not the enemy, and ultimately, politics is the art of compromise, and we need to find a way to get there.”

Retired government teacher Patton Feichter says his students found the world of politics — warts and all — fascinating and did not shy away from volatile issues. At a 10-year reunion with some of his high school students, he was pleased to see the graduates were still engaged, even though they had chosen a variety of career paths. “They all had one thing in common: They had this understanding and appreciation and excitement about issues that still stuck with them 10 years later after they graduated high school,” Feichter says. “And that I was so happy about.”

Michael Ramsey



Students participated in a Mikva Challenge-sponsored Civics Fair at Little Village Lawndale High School in Chicago.

Illinois state Rep. William Davis, a Hazel Crest Democrat, is sympathetic to the goals of civics advocates here. He co-sponsored legislation in 2007 that directed regional superintendents to review the civics curriculum of their local schools, which in turn could have tapped private grants allowing teachers to attend workshops. The measure was signed into law by then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich but never received the state funding that was necessary, supporters say.

Davis predicts any new proposal would hit a similar snag at the Capitol.

"We'll run into this question of mandate and how to fund it. That will always be there," he says.

For now, the backers of civics education reforms aren't waiting on the legislature. They're taking their message to individual schools and educators.

Feichter, the retired teacher, is Illinois coordinator for the Center for Civic Education, a not-for-profit that offers a line of supplemental teaching material to schools. He first attended one of CCE's seminars in 1990 and began incorporating its "We the People" texts in his government class at Main South High School in Park Ridge until he retired in 2001.

The Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, part of a national campaign, was launched in 2004 with support from organizations like the McCormick Foundation, the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago and the Mikva Challenge. The consortium issued a report in 2009 outlining a "civics blueprint" for high schools that emphasizes hands-on activities and service learning. The coalition also has partnered with schools to audit their civics programs and bring them up to a status known as "Democracy School." So far, 15 schools from the Chicago region have participated.

"The schools that have partaken in the process so far have been low-hanging fruit. They're frankly doing a good job already," says the McCormick Foundation's Healy, who chairs the coalition. "Our challenge going forward is to build Democracy Schools. It's not just to recognize schools that are doing a good job. We know there's a lot of work we need to do on that front."

Kiehna, the regional superintendent for Monroe and Randolph counties, hopes to generate a similar kind of knowledge-sharing in his sector of the state. He already mentors teachers and students under a CCE program called "Project Citizen." Over the summer, he worked with the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute to organize an October 26 conference at Southern Illinois University. Downstate teachers and principals who attend will get some low-cost, practical ideas on improving their civics sections.

"Folks in Chicago are very fortunate to have a big bar association and lots of attorneys who get involved with school districts. We don't have that," Kiehna says. "We've got to figure out what works for us down here. Ignoring it is not acceptable."

The ongoing discussion about strengthening civics in schools is not just an academic exercise, advocates say.

"What's at stake is our democracy as we know it," Feichter says. "We could lose all of the freedoms that we have today. People take them for granted already. And the more they take them for granted and don't understand them, the greater the chance they're going to be gone forever." ■

Mike Ramsey is a Chicago-based freelance writer.

by Kerry Lester



'KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON'



Preckwinkle tackles first term with history in mind

Just before 4 p.m. on a midsummer afternoon, the entrance to Cook County Board President Tony Preckwinkle's office is dark and silent, without a receptionist on hand.

Yet, unbeknownst to many who pass through the County Building's marble halls at that hour,

behind a door to the left, the Chicago Democrat is working, inside a personal space sparsely decorated with pieces of African-American art.

As she sifts through papers, she is lunching — late — on a takeout order of meatloaf and mashed potatoes from a cafeteria across the street, sipping

water out of a red mug bearing the inscription, “Keep calm and carry on.”

“It was given to me by a friend,” Preckwinkle, 64, says with a chuckle, “with this position in mind.”

“Keep calm and carry on” was a British government motto during World War II, intended to raise morale in the event of invasion. Yet, it could easily translate to Preckwinkle’s approach to her early tenure at the helm of the state’s most populous county.

The former high school history teacher has faced the first seven months of her term with a stiff upper lip, unhesitant to tussle with those both outside and within her party in her efforts to dramatically clean up the scandal-marred office, using tactics she’d picked up over the years as a teacher and a Chicago alderman.

Preckwinkle was elected November 2 after trouncing then-board President Todd Stroger in the Democratic primary the February before.

On the campaign trail, Preckwinkle vowed to “cut taxes and clean up county government” and pursue a reform agenda in marked contrast to her predecessor.

As it became clear that she would decisively win the general election, with 69 percent of the vote compared with 27 percent for Republican challenger Roger Keats, Preckwinkle made a simple declaration to supporters at her election night party at the Holiday Inn at Chicago’s Merchandise Mart.

“The party’s over.”

Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin had, remarked at the end of 2010 that the board president’s office had deteriorated “almost to a point where it is nonfunctional.”

Stroger, a former city alderman and state representative, was put on the Democratic primary ballot in 2006, after his father, 12-year board president John Stroger, suffered a debilitating stroke while in office.

Like his predecessors, the younger Stroger’s singular term was beset by scandal, including the promotion of a cousin to county chief financial officer, the hiring of a busboy with a felony conviction to a \$60,000 a year position as a human resources assistant and spending \$13,000 on office furniture for his spokesman, a friend since childhood.

It was also marked with an unpopular 1 percentage point sales tax increase, something Preckwinkle vowed in her campaign to repeal after addressing the county’s growing deficit.

On December 6, when the former teacher assumed office, she approached her term ahead much like the rubric she used to plot her teaching plans — lesson by lesson.

“From December of 2008 when I declared my candidacy to when I got sworn in, you’re involved in a countywide campaign that’s pretty intense,” she says. “We knew we’d moved from that right to three months on the budget, and then right to performance management and the budget for 2012.”

The county faced a \$487 million budget gap in 2011, and Preckwinkle received little help from Stroger’s office in making a transition.

“We tried to get him to work with us,” she says. “He wanted me to promise I’d keep some of his people on board. I wouldn’t do that.”

Bucking Stroger’s wishes, she began to build a new team led by 31-year-old chief of staff Kurt Summers, who had impressed Preckwinkle with his work on the city’s bid for the 2016 Olympics.

“Kurt was in charge of recruiting the people we’ve hired,” Preckwinkle says, noting her staff reflects a combination of “campaign people, transition people and recruited people.”

As she announced her appointments, she criticized examples of nepotism elsewhere in the county, including Assessor — and Cook County Democratic Party chairman — Joseph Berrios, who hired his son and sister.

Preckwinkle says she had never hired a family member during her two decades as a Chicago alderman, a standard she vowed to uphold as county president.

Stroger, Preckwinkle says, forced the office to “basically transition without his help and support.”

When her staffers requested budget information, they got piles of unorganized paper. When she asked for county inventory, she got vague lists.

On her own, Preckwinkle set to work slowly and methodically, looking at the previous year’s budget, bringing in department by department, elected official by elected official, with the goal of cutting an average of 16 percent across the board.

“We said, ‘We’ve got to do this; you figure out how,’ ” Preckwinkle says of her edict to the county’s various departments.

In doing so, she went head-to-head more than once with several county officials, including Sheriff Tom Dart and State’s Attorney Anita Alvarez, a fact she was unabashed in noting to editorial boards across the county, which she visited touting her budget cutting efforts.

"Part of this is I'm a history teacher, and you know newspapers and magazines are the first draft of history," she says. "If you have any brains, you make yourself as available to the people who are writing the first draft of history as possible."

Preckwinkle accused Dart of abandoning budget negotiations, telling editorial boards that he could meet her suggested cutback by reining in medical leave cases, a theory Dart's office objected to.

Alvarez, too, initially rejected proposed cuts, noting such extensive cuts would be "catastrophic for victims of crime."

Eventually, however, both offices came aboard.

Alvarez's office and the public defender's office were granted 10 percent cuts, and in a close-to-deadline compromise, Dart's office agreed to a 12 percent cut.

Again, the self-assured my-way-or-the-highway attitude of the high school teacher surfaced with Preckwinkle.

"You have to have a good sense of yourself cause you're going to get buffeted," she says. "You have to be on to hold people accountable for what they do or fail to do."

With Alvarez and Dart, she notes, "you don't need to be best friends with the people you're working with. We're moving ahead on our goals we all agree on."

Preckwinkle in February proposed a \$3 billion 2011 budget, down from \$3.56 billion in 2010.

The plan called for an estimated 1,075 layoffs — about 4 percent of the county's workforce of roughly 24,000.

Departments took cuts that averaged 15 percent, with most meeting Preckwinkle's call for a 16 percent cut across the board. Her own office's budget was cut by 17 percent, really 20 percent, she notes, because Stroger had been spending more than he had allotted.

Preckwinkle's February 1 budget address was well-received by the county board and highly praised by government watchdog groups, including the Civic Federation of Chicago.

"I think what the president presented to us is pretty much what I've been looking forward to seeing for the four years I've been on the board," Bartlett Commissioner Timothy Schneider remarked to the media at the time. Schneider said it called for "a return to fiscal responsibility, a return to efficient county government, cutting the waste, cutting the corruption, and I think we're on our way to doing that."

Several of Preckwinkle's early decisions addressed a report she had backed more than a year before, shortly after her successful bid in the Democratic primary.

In February 2010, the University of Illinois and the Better Government Association released a joint report on the "pervasive pattern of corruption" in Cook County over the past four decades and called for a series of reforms.

"We're not standing in front of Todd Stroger's office because we're blaming Stroger for four decades. He's just the latest in a long line of county officials who weren't minding the store properly or well enough," BGA executive director Andy Shaw said at the news conference at the Cook County building in Chicago.

The report cited nearly 150 convicted county employees, including a ring of property tax "fixers" in the assessor's office in the 1970s, and corruption in the Cook County Sheriff's Office under James O'Grady and James Dvorak in the 1980s. It also cited several scandals in Stroger's current office, including the hiring of convicted busboy Tony Cole for a \$61,189 human resources job. Reforms the report suggested include limiting nepotism further, requiring a forensic audit of the county at all levels, putting contract information online and requiring accountability and transparency from the county's inspector general. One of those reforms came in June, when Preckwinkle announced the ending of the failed, costly and controversial Project Shield — a \$44 million Homeland Security program under investigation by the FBI.

Marking her 100th day in office in March, Preckwinkle released a "report card" in which she had graded her efforts in office thus far and looked ahead toward the rest of her term.

Preckwinkle says she had completed one-third of 33 key initiatives, noting that government employees would likely have to share in sacrifice, accepting compensation cuts in health care and pension benefits.

She also said she would work toward annexing unincorporated Cook County areas to reduce spending, working with local municipalities to incorporate those areas into various suburban communities.

Preckwinkle has, over the past seven months, made a visit to each of the 17 Cook County districts, stretching from west suburban Bartlett to Beverly on the city's southwest side.

"I think she's starting to realize that Cook County is a lot broader than the city of Chicago," Orland Park Republican Commissioner Liz

Gorman says. "She is a regular out in the suburbs; she does know where the suburbs are at."

On a broader level, Preckwinkle's STAR — "Set Targets, Achieve Results" — performance management program now requires all county departments to have performance measures in place for budgeting purposes.

"Virtually no one in the county was keeping track of what they were doing and how long it took them to perform tasks," she says.

Among the goals outlined are reducing county hospital wait time, getting property tax bills out on time and downsizing county jail populations. In setting such performance goals, the county is uncovering example after example of inefficiency, she says.

For instance, the county has discovered its revenue department has been, for years, devoting almost as many staff members to ensuring that residents in unincorporated areas had vehicle stickers, as it was to retrieving uncollected cigarette and alcohol taxes.

"There's a heck of a lot more money in uncollected cigarette and alcohol taxes," Preckwinkle says.

The plan calls for quarterly reports on each county agency's performance, with progressive steps toward corrective action. Her budget office will use the data for allocating resources.

As she moved ahead in her efforts to trim the county's budget, not every department was on board with the plan.

This time, Cook County Chief Judge Timothy Evans argued that his office was not under the scope of the county board, noting it has already launched its own separate set of reforms.

"I'm not arguing we should tell any judge what sentence to deliver or how to run the court system ... we need his cooperation on how we're going to measure progress. We need to speed up our process, and that saves jail time," she says.

Evans did not respond to interview requests, and Preckwinkle says in recent weeks, their exchanges have been limited to her sending his office a copy of STAR's July performance report.

In the past seven months, Preckwinkle has reached out to leaders at the state and federal levels, along with those within the county.

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Preckwinkle have begun to work together on common issues, announcing in July a plan to enhance city-county cooperation, aiming to save as much as \$140 million a year. Their Chicago offices are just yards apart, but in the past, former Mayor Richard M. Daley kept a distance from the county board his brother John served on.

"We both agreed it made sense to work together," Preckwinkle says. "I think we're going to be able to develop a historic partnership. It's unfortunate the city and the county haven't worked together at all in the past."

It has also made sense, she says, to get to know Springfield lawmakers, something they say is a departure from her predecessor's practices.

While Preckwinkle, who calls herself an independent Democrat, considers herself to be politically similar to former



political gadfly Gov. Pat Quinn, her work with the governor was the source of another tussle.

The county asked a state panel for permission to turn south suburban Oak Forest Hospital into an outpatient clinic in June. That request was ultimately rejected because Quinn was slow to fill panel vacancies, resulting in a shortage of votes.

Preckwinkle was vocal not only about the panel oversight but the fact that the state had failed to process nearly \$40 million in Medicaid applications by the Cook County Health and Hospital System during Quinn's tenure as governor.

Keeping calm and carrying on ultimately prevailed.

After Preckwinkle expressed her disappointment, the governor's office and her office got together to prioritize applications. And Quinn later filled the board's vacancies.

"I need to have good relationships with people at the state level," she says. "I'm working on that."

Don't expect her to get warm and fuzzy, Gorman warns.

"She's obviously one of the strongest leaders I've had the opportunity to serve with," the Orland Park commissioner says.

While Preckwinkle has made various outreaches to commissioners on budget issues and performance management, she has not attempted to develop personal relationships with her commissioners. "On a personal level, no, there's nothing," Gorman says.

"I think her demeanor is perfectly appropriate to the job she has in front of her and the gravity of that job," says Oak Park Democratic Sen. Don Harmon. "The county has a horribly difficult set of responsibilities with health care, criminal and civil justice and the jail. It's an unbelievable difficult burden."

Republican House Leader Tom Cross of Oswego says his relationship with Preckwinkle is "night and day," compared with Stroger.

"It's no-nonsense. It's kinda the old-fashioned way," Cross says, detailing a recent conversation about pension reform. "We live in this world of emails and texts. She picks up the phone and says, 'I need this.' She says thank you. That's refreshing."

"I served with Todd in the House, I don't think he ever called me on an issue." ■

Kerry Lester is politics and projects writer for the Arlington Heights-based Daily Herald.

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September 29: Landscapes of the Public:
Jens Jensen – Native Landscape Architecture

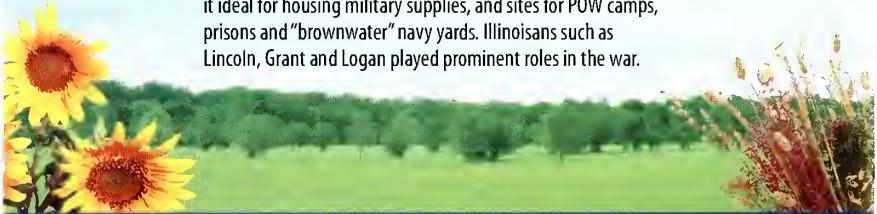
Jens Jensen was one of the most influential designers to popularize native gardens. He showed that beautiful gardens can have native species, and can appear in their respective places as they would be without human involvement. Jensen's legacy can be seen in major parks in Chicago and Lincoln Memorial Gardens in Springfield.

October 28: Landscapes of the Judicial System: Conviction – Guilty or Innocent?

Guilt or innocence – either can result in conviction. The Downstate Illinois Innocence Project (DIIP) was founded at UIS to address the nature and severity of conviction of the innocent. Problems and possible reforms of a criminal justice system which can result in conviction of the innocent will be shared, along with past case experiences.

December 8: Landscapes of Memory: The Civil War as Illinois History

During the Civil War, the state of Illinois was a pivotal resource for war efforts. More than 250,000 Illinoisans served in the Union army. The state's geographic location and resources made it ideal for housing military supplies, and sites for POW camps, prisons and "brownwater" navy yards. Illinoisans such as Lincoln, Grant and Logan played prominent roles in the war.



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OBITUARY

Lura Lynn Ryan



Lura Lynn Ryan

The wife of Illinois' imprisoned former governor died June 27 after a battle with lung cancer. She was 76. Lura Lynn Rowe, who grew up in Aroma Park, met her future husband George Ryan in a freshman English class at Kankakee

High School. They were married 55 years. During that time, George Ryan, a pharmacist, rose from local politics to the General Assembly's leadership to state executive jobs that culminated in the governorship.

Her husband was her childhood sweetheart. She still had pictures of him in his school football uniform, says longtime Ryan friend Tony Leone, who served as clerk of the Illinois House when George Ryan was speaker. "They were sweethearts forever. They played off each other like a young couple might. I just pray that she knew he was there with her at her deathbed."

Leone says Lura Lynn Ryan was a gracious hostess who had an ability to make diverse people feel comfortable. "I think she was one of the most gracious first ladies that set a high mark for future first ladies to follow."

As George Ryan's career in politics expanded, his wife took on a series of projects, including working with substance abuse and prevention.

In a prepared statement, Gov. Pat Quinn said: "As Illinois' first lady, Lura Lynn Ryan dedicated herself

to representing those whose voices weren't heard. She worked tirelessly to protect the future of Illinois' children and was an advocate for seniors and those battling substance abuse. She inspired many with her strength and grace throughout her fight against cancer."

"Her passing is a loss to the people in Illinois, and my thoughts and prayers go out to Lura Lynn's family, friends and the many individuals whose lives she touched as we honor a truly great woman."

"When she became first lady for the four years, she took on a number of projects that were very, very important," Leone says. Her greatest achievement, he adds, may have been taking a strong role in the establishment of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

"It made probably as significant an impact on Springfield as anything ever has since getting the capital located here," Leone says. "I think it saved historic downtown Springfield."

She chaired the board of directors of the library and museum during its formative years, working to gain financing. She was also a member of the national Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

Ryan coordinated efforts to create the book, *History from the Heart: Quilt Paths Across Illinois*, and boosted interest in arts and crafts through the establishment of the Artisans' Village at the Illinois State Fair and the first-ever *Made in Illinois* catalog of local artists. She also co-wrote the book, *At Home with Illinois' Governors: A Social History of the Illinois Executive Mansion, 1855-2003*.

The Ryan family requests that memorial contributions be made to the Lura Lynn Ryan Charitable Trust.

Reform campaign names new chief



Brian Gladstein

Brian Gladstein of Chicago is the new director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform. He takes over leadership from **Cindi Canary**, who has guided the nonprofit since its founding by the late Sen. Paul Simon in 1997.

"Despite Illinois' too rich history of government scandals," Gladstein said in a press release, "progress has been made, and it is due in part to the tireless and tenacious work of ICPR under the leadership of Cindi Canary and the supporters of ICPR."

Gladstein was program director of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs for the past 11 years. His advocacy and policy work with the council and other community organizations has included government reform, economic development, housing, public transportation and the environment. He helped create a program

that encourages more informed citizen participation in Chicago government, and he oversaw the creation of the council's website with information on issues, a report card evaluating city and political leaders, data on campaign contributions and a toolkit to help citizens engage their elected representatives.

He received a bachelor's degree in public affairs/environmental science from Indiana University and a master's degree in urban planning and policy/community development from the University of Illinois Chicago.

"Working with many others in and out of government, ICPR has helped enact significant improvements in government transparency and campaign finance restrictions," Ross Harano, president of the ICPR board of directors, said in a prepared statement. "Brian's experience and enthusiasm will help us maintain that momentum and grow on the strong foundation built by Cindi Canary, our previous director."

Big people on campus

Phyllis Wise will begin duties as vice president and chancellor at the Urbana-Champaign campus of the University of Illinois in October, pending approval of the university board of trustees. Wise has served as provost and executive vice president at the University of Washington since 2005. During the 2010-2011 academic year, she served as interim president. From 2002-2005, she was dean of the College of Biological Sciences at the University of California-Davis.

Wise will hold a tenured faculty position in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Department of Cell and Developmental Biology, and an appointment in the College of Medicine's Department of Molecular and Integrative Physiology. She holds a bachelor's degree from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania and a doctorate from the University of Michigan.

"Dr. Wise has the 'full package,'" University of Illinois President Michael Hogan said in a news release. "She is a proven scholar, with a deep commitment to public higher education, and has an exceptional reputation as a leader at some of the

nation's top universities. I couldn't be more pleased to have her joining our distinguished leadership team."

In that release, Wise said: "I am thrilled to join the University of Illinois community in the role of vice president and chancellor. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is one of the most respected institutions of higher education in the world. I look forward to working with the faculty, staff and students, and the university's many external stakeholders and partners, to build on its strengths and create new opportunities for the university to have an even greater impact."

She succeeds **Robert Easter**, who has served as interim vice president and chancellor since the 2009 so-called clout scandal resulted in the resignation of then-Chancellor Richard Herman. The *Chicago Tribune* had reported that some politically connected applicants to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign received special consideration for acceptance between 2005 and 2009, despite having sub-par qualifications.



Phyllis Wise

Shifts at the top

Erica Borggren is the director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs. An army veteran, Borggren previously served as a senior staff member for Army Gen. David Petraeus. She replaces fellow Iraq war veteran **Dan Grant**, who is leaving to pursue a post-graduate degree.

"Time and again, Erica Borggren has shined in the armed forces," Gov. Quinn said in a release. "Her outstanding service makes her an excellent choice to lead the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs as it fulfills its mission to serve the brave men and women who have sacrificed for this country."

Borggren served as a speechwriter for Petraeus during his time as commanding general of multinational forces in Iraq and as head of U.S. central command throughout the Middle East.

Borggren said in the release: "As a daughter of Illinois and a veteran who is committed to a life of public service, I am thrilled to have the chance to work with and for Illinois' veteran community."

A valedictorian at West Point, Borggren was a Rhodes scholar. She received a master's degree in comparative social policy from Oxford.

Michael Gelder is the acting director of the Illinois Department on Aging. He replaces **Charles Johnson**, who recently retired.

"Michael Gelder has shown time and again that he is able to bring people together to solve important and often-complex issues," Gov. Pat Quinn said in a prepared statement. "His experience and commitment to public service will be valuable in this transition."

Gelder had been Quinn's senior health policy adviser since 2009. In that role, he led efforts to modernize and reform Illinois' health care and long-term care systems. He holds a master's degree in health administration from the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis and a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University.

Ann Schneider is acting secretary of the Illinois Department of Transportation. Schneider's appointment follows the retirement of **Gary Hannig**, who served as Illinois' transportation secretary since 2009. Schneider currently serves as the agency's chief of operations.

"As we head into this busy construction season, the Department of Transportation needs an energetic and capable leader, and Ann L. Schneider has shown herself time and again to be just that," Quinn said in a press release. Schneider will oversee more than \$2.5 billion in capital projects scheduled for 2011. She served as IDOT's chief of operations since 2010. Prior to that, she served five years as director and chief financial officer for IDOT's Office of Finance and Administration.

Schneider has a bachelor's degree from Augustana College and a master's degree in public administration from Sangamon State University (now University of Illinois Springfield).

Big names

Gov. Pat Quinn made some appointments of well-known individuals to a trio of boards.

Former state treasurer and U.S. Senate candidate **Alexi Giannoulias** was appointed to serve as chairman of the Illinois Community College Board, which is an unpaid position.

Former Senate President **Emil Jones** was named chairman of the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority, a position that carries no salary.

Attorney **Jennifer Burke**, daughter of Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke and Chicago Ald. Edward Burke, was appointed to the Illinois Pollution Control Board, a post that pays \$117,000 a year. At a news conference, Quinn said family connections and campaign contributions did not influence the appointment.

The state Senate must confirm the appointments.

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Letters to the Editor

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Green energy needs existing sources

I read Jamey Dunn's July State of the State article with great interest (see *Illinois Issues* July/August, page 6). The "green" industry will only work in conjunction with existing energy sources, and I will tell you why.

Most of the "green" energy in Illinois will revolve around wind and solar. I don't believe most of the general public knows that electricity can't be stored on the grid. For us to have electricity in our homes whenever we want it, a combination of nuclear, coal or natural gas power plants have to run 24/7. Our creator doesn't provide wind and sun 24/7. Solar panels are only good when the sun shines, and wind turbines work when the wind blows more than 10 mph. There has not been a single nuclear, coal or natural gas power plant taken off line because of wind or solar power in Illinois or anywhere in the United States.

Lew Hay, from Obama's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness, commented on the billions of dollars given to the oil industry. Let's talk about subsidies for wind turbines. In Vermilion and Champaign counties, we will soon have 134 wind turbines. The subsidies on this 200 megawatt wind farm will exceed \$80 million. This is taxpayer money that is funding a power source that only works, at best, 30 percent of the time.

Wind and solar will never take the place of conventional power plants. This energy is the most expensive form of electric generation. Cap and trade is what the Obama administration wants to do to make wind and solar more competitive. This will create more of a financial hardship for the average citizen with ever increasing electric rates.

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Illinois Issues



Illinois' fiscal situation shows signs of recovery

**Charles N. Wheeler III**

Slowly but steadily, Illinois' fiscal fortunes appear to be on the road to recovery after two years of falling revenues and unprecedented budget deficits.

The prognosis — one of guarded optimism — emerges from a review of recent reports from the legislature's fiscal agency and from state Comptroller Judy Baar Topinka. The encouraging signs include:

- Almost \$4 billion growth in base revenues during Fiscal Year 2011, which ended June 30, helping to produce a closing general funds balance more than triple that of a year ago.
- Roughly \$1 billion less in unpaid bills at the comptroller's office to start the new budget year than were on hand on July 1, 2010.
- An FY 2012 budget crafted to spend less than revenues expected to come in during the year.

Perhaps the most welcome sign is the revenue growth. To be sure, the income tax rate increase enacted in January was the main reason receipts grew, and a tax amnesty program last fall also played a key role. But other factors were at work, too.

"The magnitude of the effect of those items (tax increase and amnesty) served to mask the underlying improvement in the economic sources that was happening simultaneously with the tax changes," wrote revenue manager Jim Muschinske in the year-end report of the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability. "While impossible to dissect and assign values to each, it was clear from receipting performance that revenues were recovering from last year's dismal showing which saw receipts plunge over \$2 billion," he noted.

Among major sources, personal income tax receipts jumped \$2.7 billion, to \$11.2 billion net of refunds, while corporate taxes rose \$491 million, to \$1.9 billion net of refunds. Sales taxes were up \$525 million to \$6.8 billion, the commission reported.

In fact, the FY 2011 take of \$30.5 billion was the first general funds revenue growth in three years, following drops of \$2 billion in FY 2010 and of \$515 million in FY 2009.

The extra cash helped the state to end the fiscal year with \$469 million in the bank, up from \$130 million a year earlier, according to a report from the comptroller.

"After three years of declining end-of-year ... balances, fiscal year 2011 has concluded with Illinois in a better position than it was 12 months ago," Topinka wrote in the July *Comptroller's Quarterly*. "But that improvement may be temporary, as not all of the state's liabilities for the year — such as certain health insurance bills and tax refunds — have been factored into the equation."

The comptroller said the June 30 bill backlog, some dating back to January, totaled some \$3.8 billion, down from \$4.7 billion last year. But an additional \$1.3 billion in vouchers could be in the pipeline, along with almost \$2 billion in unpaid state employee health insurance bills and unpaid corporate income tax refunds.

"Even more important than the end-of-year snapshot, though, is this reality: Illinois continues to face staggering long-term financial challenges," Topinka wrote. And while the state "appears to be improving its overall financial condition, it will take time to regain its fiscal footing."

Rough spots surely lie ahead — Topinka pointed to a likely ongoing backlog of bills in her office and significant delays in payments to vendors — but the FY 2012 spending plan now in place should provide a good foundation.

For the first time in a long time, lawmakers fashioned a budget based on their best guess as to how much money will come in to cover its outlays. Their approach was in sharp contrast to the last two budgets they gave Gov. Pat Quinn, neither of which made any pretense of matching outgo to income, but instead gave the governor huge pots of money and unprecedented authority to spend it as he wished. The catch, of course, was that allocations far outstripped the cash in FY 2010, leading to a record budgetary deficit of \$6.4 billion. Coupled with the \$3.7 billion deficit for FY 2009 — former Gov. Rod Blagojevich's last budget — the two-year red-ink tsunami surpassed the total of all

the budget deficits the state racked up over the four previous decades of annual budgets. The final tally for FY 2011 won't be known until the end of the calendar year, when the last of the bills have to be paid, but the deficit seems sure to be much less than FY 2010, thanks to the tax increase and improving economic conditions.

And when FY 2012 ends next summer, Illinois might even see a surplus for the first time since 2001, thanks to expected continued revenue growth — almost \$3 billion net despite the loss of \$1 billion in federal stimulus funds — if lawmakers continue their budget restraint. The General Assembly approved a \$49 billion budget for FY 2012, including \$23.9 billion in general funds, both substantially below the corresponding FY 2011 authorizations. The budget provided the full \$4+ billion payment to the state's woefully underfunded retirement systems. Quinn trimmed the bottom line even further, to \$23.5 billion in general funds, some \$5.7 billion less than the FY 2011 number.

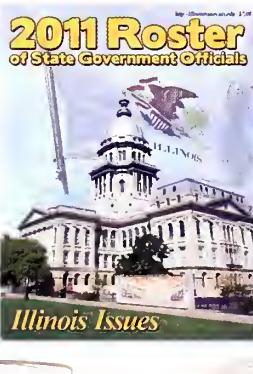
Advocates objected that the cuts came disproportionately from education and human services, and efforts to restore funding seem certain in the fall session. Moreover, lawmakers cut some programs without changing the statutory

provisions that govern spending. One notable example was a \$152 million reduction in general state aid, the program that provides the largest chunk of money that goes to local schools. But legislators didn't change the law that guarantees each school district at least \$6,119 per student. As a result, the money likely won't cover all the eligible claims over the entire school year, officials said.

More problematic, the legislature didn't provide enough money to cover contractual pay raises for state employees, so Quinn refused to honor the contract, a decision that state worker unions are challenging in court. The governor also faces legislative pushback on his effort to cut Medicaid provider fees and to revamp state employee health care programs, moves he contends that are necessary to hold down costs. Should Quinn not prevail, spending likely would go up.

And long-term, of course, the state still faces huge unfunded liabilities in its pension systems. For now, though, Illinoisans can be heartened by the signs that the outlook is improving for state finances. ■

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois Springfield.



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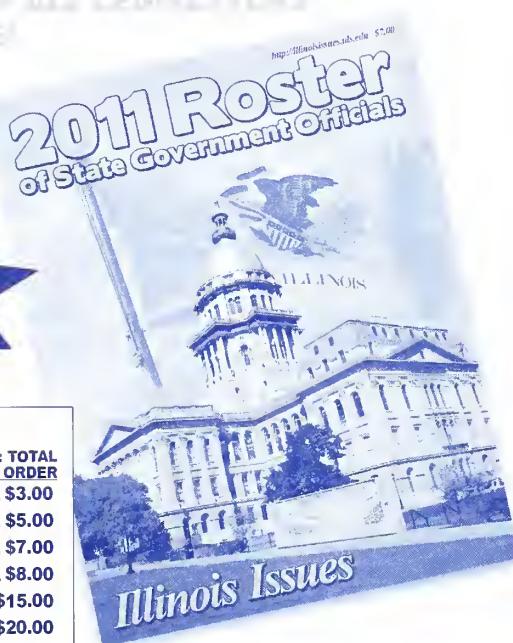
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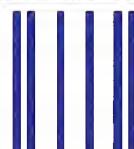
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